The Nation.

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EDITORIAL

AUTUMN OF A MATRIARCH

After these eleven awful years, what should Britain be singing? "Ding dong, the witch is dead"? "Ain't gonna work on Maggie's farm no more"? Or maybe just one word will do, borrowed from a headline in Rupert Murdoch's Thatcherite tabloid, *The Sun*: "Gotcha!" It's now apparent that Margaret Thatcher's dominance of British politics is over—whatever the outcome of the Conservative Party's bitter leadership battle. The Prime Minister who swore she would "go on and on" is mortally wounded if not yet dead.

But what exactly has ended here? Is it one person's political career, or the -ism that bears her name? Thatcherism has been about something much deeper than the mesmerizing ghastliness of Margaret Thatcher. It has seen itself as nothing less than a revolution; with the message that there is no alternative to capitalism, it has sought a permanent shift in human ideas.

Of course, as the song says, forever is a long long time, and Thatcher would be the first to admit that her mission is incomplete. She still hears the clanking chains of socialism in every bureaucrat's attic in Brussels, and even in her rival Michael Heseltine's brand of conservatism. But in the shorter timespans by which most people measure their lives she has left her mark. Is there a single economist of influence in Central or Eastern Europe who would question the basic economic logic of Thatcherism?

Or in Britain, for that matter. The Labor Party under Neil Kinnock is a creature of the Thatcherite eighties. It understood that Thatcher's personality would in the end make her unelectable. So it strove for the opposite image—bland, centrist, managerial. When election time comes around, it may occur to the voters that this sounds strikingly like the Tory Party without Margaret Thatcher.

C.I.A. GLADIATORS
Daniel Singer

MY VIETNAM, MY AMERICA
Andrew Lam

LET 'EM EAT PESTICIDES
Nancy Watzman

FREE SPEECH FOR THE RICH
Frank Askin

POTOMAC PUN-DITRY
Philip M. Stern

ART FOR PEERS' SAKE
Margaret Spillane

PRAGUE GETS THE CHICAGO TREATMENT

GEORGE BLACK

Prague

To make one thing clear from the start: The most important and influential person in Czechoslovakia today is not its playwright-President, Vaclav Havel. It is someone whose name will be less familiar, except maybe to a regular reader of *The Economist*, *The Wall Street Journal* and *National Review*. That man is Finance Minister Vaclav Klaus. He is what Chileans would call a "Chicago boy," an unreconstructed apostle of the economic theories of Friedrich von Hayek and Milton Friedman. He is also, since his election on October 13, the chair of Civic Forum, the loose grouping of intellectuals that brought down Czechoslovakia's decrepit Communist regime a year ago.

Behind Klaus's ascent is the failure of the new politics of Central Europe—or rather its "antipolitics," to use the term commonly associated with such intellectuals as Poland's Adam Michnik, Hungary's Gyorgy Konrad and Havel himself. The most systematic chronicler of antipolitics has been the British writer Timothy Garton Ash. Of late, Garton Ash has tended to spend his time celebrating the return of the region to a "normal" European capitalist mainstream (a point to which we shall return). But in the mid-1980s, in a series of essays in the London *Spectator* and *The New York Review of Books*, he posed some questions that are a useful starting point for thinking about the first year of Czechoslovakia's "velvet revolution."

(*Cont. on p. 732*)

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LETTERS.

GAYWRIGHTS

New York City

In his theater column of November 12, Thomas M. Disch distorts an article I wrote in *The New York Times* of January 23, 1966. Disch says I argued "that homosexual playwrights should write about their own kind exclusively, thus ridding the theater of the '*disguised* homosexual influence.'" The word "exclusively" is his addition, as are the italics.

The whole intent of my article – and it was so understood by many – was to point out that if homosexual playwrights were forced to transform their experience into heterosexual experience for our theater, it was the general public that was to blame; that homosexuals ought to be able to write as freely as other playwrights. The article concluded:

> A serious public, seriously interested in the theater, must sooner or later consider that, when it complains of homosexual influences and distortions, it is complaining, at one remove, about its own attitudes. I note further that one of the few contemporary dramatists whose works are candidates for greatness – Jean Genet – is a homosexual who has never had to disguise his nature.

Anyone interested can read the whole article, and another on the same subject that appeared two weeks later, in my collection *Persons of the Drama* (Harper & Row) and can decide whether I merit the title of Witch Hunter General that Disch bestows on me.

Stanley Kauffmann

PLAYWRONGS

Redding, Conn.

I wonder what sort of paranoia troubles your Thomas M. Disch that he should brood about something I wrote for the *Times* about fifty years ago. In misapprehending what I wrote he accuses Brooks Atkinson and Clive Barnes of following my lead in attacking gay playwrights, which I did not do.

What I did was to plead for gay playwrights to be free to write about their concerns and not to deal with them as if they were heterosexual problems which were being presented in distorted terms.

I did not lead any sort of charge, and anyone who checks out my reviews in the *Times* will not find any hostility or bias against creative gay people, whether playwrights, or composers, or performers.

Howard Taubman

DISCH REPLIES

New York City

Readers interested in a more developed account of this unhappy episode in theater history should read the book by Kaier Curtin that reminded me of it: *'We Can Always Call Them Bulgarians': The Emergence of Lesbians and Gay Men on the American Stage* (Alyson Publications). Reading the relevant final chapter, it is easy to see why Kauffmann and Taubman would like to place another construction on the words they wrote then than the words themselves permit.

As to the matter of accuracy, the word "exclusively" was my own characterization (and a fair one) and not offered as a quote. The italics appear in my source, which reads in full: "I do not argue for increased homosexual influences in our theater. It is precisely because I, like many others, am weary of *disguised* homosexual influences that I raise the matter." If the italics are in error, my apologies. But Kauffmann's meaning remains, and it is one that I, as a gay writer, cannot but feel intimidating.

Thomas M. Disch

THE SILBER LINING

Dorchester, Mass.

I enjoy fulmination as much as anyone, but your October 8 editorial "Tarnished Silber" got some things seriously wrong, much as the Boston media you criticize did. What John Silber said about Area B in Dorchester was that there was no point in talking to drug addicts on crime control because the right place to do that was in the State House. Had Silber won the primary by making racism his issue, he would not have, as he did, garnered 40 percent of the black vote.

He may have been a perfect bogyman for some liberals. Others of us, with longer memories, remember notable struggles on the civil rights front he waged in his Texas days and since. The man is simply more complex than you think. In foreign affairs he may seem conservative; in domestic affairs, from his opposition to capital punishment through his quite notable writings on law, his defense of civil liberties and his reasoned approach to curing social ills by programs that might actually help – nutrition, day care, preschool education and much else – he is far more liberal in the classic sense than you care to admit.

Keith Botsford

WELDSCHMERZ

Grafton, Mass.

I find it incredible that *The Nation* endorsed William Weld, the future Governor of Massachusetts, in the editorial attacking John (Mad Dog) Silber's reactionary paternalism. Weld is pro-choice, but he is also a lightweight who has embraced a tax rollback petition that would further decimate state and local services, including many programs that assist poor women. These cutbacks inevitably undermine or destroy a range of environmental options, despite Weld's supposed environmentalism (as suspect as that of George Bush). Weld sucked up to the gun lobby, opposing even the mildest restrictions on assault weapons, and he has said nothing about the increasingly impoverished and violence-vulnerable condition of minority and urban communities in Massachusetts.

Bob Higgins

HEART ATTACK

Winter Park, Fla.

President Bush says our incursion into Saudi Arabia is to protect democracy and to discourage aggression. I am so happy to hear that he has had a change of heart. During the continuing crisis in Lithuania, when this small, brave nation reaffirmed its independence from the Russians and its right to self-determination, President Bush sided against democracy and with Gorbachev.

Heaven help the small countries who are fighting for freedom and democracy and who have no oil!

Alfred Sumanas
Lithuanian-American Club
of Central Florida

NIP IT IN THE BUD

★

A RESPONSE TO 'THE SECRET OF LEADERSHIP' [NOV. 5]

I love your verses, Calvin Trillin.
But nonetheless, I am not willin'
To think that just a balding pate
Confers the strength to rule the state.
At this idea my spirit quails,
For baldness is a trait of males,
While women tend to keep their hair.
Do you imply that therefore they're
Less qualified to rule than men?
Not just the hormones and the brain,
But now the hair becomes a sign
Of our inferior design.
I do not think that we should fall
For this most suspect rationale
For masculine supremacy
Through socio-biology.
And so I do not think it's true.
If you were female, nor would you.

Ann Taylor Allen
Louisville, Ky.

The Nation welcomes letters – typed, double spaced and no longer than 300 words, please. Letters may be edited for reasons of space.

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EDITORIALS.

Will It Sell?

The spectacle of President Bush and his crew searching the world over for a plausible reason to invade or destroy Iraq is only one of the many bizarre features of the "new world order" allegedly in formation. Presidents always lie about their acts of aggression, but until now they have generally stuck to the stories they invented at the outset. In the good old cold war days, a Communist threat was the universal rationale for every American landing from Inchón to Grenada. Now the purposes have a peculiar postmodern tilt. The bombing of Panama was described as a kind of blockbuster drug raid, such as might star Bruce Willis. The looming war in the Middle East is, according to various of the President's men, a sequel to World War II, a full-employment program, a recession buster, a unilateral disarmament campaign (to destroy Saddam Hussein's weaponry) and a way to force democracy and women's liberation on Arabia Deserta.

None of it makes any sense. The newsmagazines and *The New York Times* publish lengthy scenarios proposing options for the apocalypse, but everyone knows that any such elaborate design would fail the minute the first shot is fired. Bush recites his mantra, "naked aggression," to the point that he is better at parodying the Bush manner than *Satur-*

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day Night Live's Dana Carvey. But the bit is playing better in Prague than in Peoria.

The fact is, the deadly dangerous U.S. buildup in the gulf is not just another day of Bush-style electioneering, and the Administration's scattered sloganeering is so far not convincing much of America that there is any good reason for fighting and dying in the sand. Despite what Secretary of State James Baker claims, ordinary Americans' jobs will not be rescued from recession by defeating Iraq. Neither will Middle East peace be secured by flattening Baghdad. Syria, Iran, Israel and perhaps other late-blooming militarized, ambitious states will easily fill whatever power vacuum the war creates. And as for oil—as the root reason for America's rush to the gulf—it will be cheaper and more plentiful if there is a negotiated settlement.

Baker may buy, barter or wheedle enough votes for a United Nations resolution supporting the use of force, but the real problems begin with such a vote. In no way would such authorization imply a true multinational effort with any democratic base. There should be a valid and just role for the U.N. in opposing Saddam's takeover of Kuwait and similar examples of invasion and occupation, but it is impossible to see how the present configuration of power in the region can be converted from a nationalist/imperialist coalition to a true world effort. It will take more than Bush's mantras, or his bombs, to make that leap.

Backdoor Censors

Two recent setbacks for freedom of the press possess a fortuitous symmetry. One involves prior restraint and the other what might be called posterior restraint. Of graver import is the first, concerning Cable News Network's right to broadcast tapes of Gen. Manuel Noriega's telephone conversations with his lawyers. By a 7-to-2 vote, the Supreme Court refused to lift a temporary ban on airing the tapes imposed by District Judge William Hoeveler. The high court accepted the government's argument that a decision on CNN's claim of prior restraint at this time would be premature. By upholding the district judge's order the Supreme Court has introduced an element of doubt into its rulings in *Nebraska Press Association v. Stuart* and the Pentagon Papers case, which placed a near-absolute ban on prior restraint.

Although the content and the provenance of the tapes remain murky at this writing, there is good reason to believe that they reveal serious government misconduct, namely, eavesdropping on a defendant's privileged conversations with his lawyers. One can only speculate on the motives. Possibly federal prosecutors were desperate for evidence; or, for conspiracy buffs, the Administration is so terrified of what Noriega will reveal in court that it sabotaged its own case. Certainly, a stink of impropriety hangs over all this—the alleged leaking of the tapes to the Panamanian government, the purloining of tapes from a CNN employee's room by F.B.I. agents. Of course, Judge Hoeveler may lift his ban after examining the tapes; but for a judge to ban publication of a story, even temporarily, sets a precedent for future censorship of urgent, time-bound stories.

The example of "posterior restraint" was the decision by Simon & Schuster not to publish *American Psycho*, a lurid novel by Bret Easton Ellis. This incident raises fundamental questions about the editorial independence of publishing houses owned by conglomerates. According to advance accounts in *Time* and *Spy*, the novel contains shockingly graphic scenes of rape, torture and dismemberment. Because of its depictions of gratuitous violence against women, the book had stimulated strong objections at Simon & Schuster during its journey through the editorial process. Nevertheless, it looked like a blockbuster, and the decision was made to publish it. Only after seeing the advance stories, says Simon & Schuster chair Richard Snyder, did he peruse the book. He found it in "such questionable taste" that he pulled it rather than sully S&S's good name. If you believe that, you'll also believe that Martin Davis, chair of Paramount Communications, the conglomerate that owns S&S, had nothing to do with the cancellation.

It seems inconceivable that the head of a publishing company knew so little about a book that had stirred up such in-house turmoil until he read about it in the press. Corporate P.R. and fear of controversy, rather than editorial judgment, were the determining factors.

And so the issue of free speech, corporate censorship division, does arise. If *American Psycho* is as exploitative as it sounds, we find ourselves once again defending sleaze. At any rate, Ellis's book will not be suppressed. Another publisher, Vintage Contemporaries, snapped it up and is expected to make a bundle. We plan to rush out to our neighborhood bookstore and not buy it.

The Gladiators

In order to perpetuate capitalism as the final stage of history, Washington has less Hegelian means at its disposal than Francis Fukuyama suggested. For almost forty years it has maintained a secret army, a gang of "gladiators," sponsored by NATO and apparently financed in most cases by the C.I.A., whose function has been to prevent—by cloak and dagger, by hook or by crook—a "communist takeover." And not just in Guatemala or Iran at the time of Arbenz or Mossadegh but in the heart of European civilization—in Athens, Rome, Paris and beyond.

The veil was lifted accidentally earlier this year. During his investigation of the blowing up of a vehicle full of explosives, a Venetian judge stumbled upon a secret society founded in the early 1950s and code-named Gladio—"the sword." Some of the Italian gladiators, numbering nearly a thousand, were in the military; others were civilians. They all had money, arms and protection at the highest levels. The secret was so closely held that ministers who belonged to the ruling coalition but were not members of the Christian Democratic Party claim they knew nothing about it. The Christian Democrats alone knew. The investigation quickly reached the very top, and Prime Minister Giulio An-

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dreotti and President of the Republic Francesco Cossiga are now both directly involved.

With the scandal reaching such proportions in Rome, the question obviously came to mind whether Italy was going it alone. It clearly wasn't. Greece at once reported that it had had a similar gang, which was no longer needed when the colonels took over in 1967 and was not revived under Andreas Papandreou. The French Ministry of Defense claims that its local branch "fell into disuse" under General de Gaulle. In Germany former SS men were involved, with plans—in the event of a Soviet intervention—to eliminate a number of leftist personalities (including Willy Brandt, some reports say). Indeed, there is now proof that the activity of the gladiators extended to such neutral countries as Sweden and Switzerland. And one should not speak about the organization in the past tense, since its executive committee met in Brussels a few weeks ago, allegedly in order to disband or reform the whole thing now that the "communist threat" has vanished.

The establishment is trying to suggest that the operation was designed to organize resistance to a Soviet invasion. But that is clearly untrue, and this is why the Italian case is so significant. There the "threat" of an electoral victory by the Italian Communist Party was real. William Colby, who was a C.I.A. officer in the embassy in Rome at the time, has just told Italian TV that the parliamentary election of 1958 was "one of the most beautiful achievements of our organization." There is a growing suspicion in Italy that the gladiators were involved in more sinister activities, that they are somehow linked with the "black trail," with fascist bombings, with the murder of Aldo Moro, with the "strategy of tension" aimed at preventing the Communist Party not only from seizing power but from being elected to government office. The Italian left is indignant as it suddenly discovers the limits of democracy.

All limitations on sovereignty and freedom did not crumble with the Berlin wall. The prospect of a communist victory in Europe looks very distant at the moment. Nevertheless, our cautious rulers prefer to keep safeguards against any future attack on the system—that is to say, on their power and profits. The moment seems propitious on both sides of the Atlantic to take hypocritical democrats at their word and throw the fullest possible light on all hidden obstacles to the expression of the popular will. Let us keep an eye on the gladiators, and history, when the moment comes, will look after itself.

DANIEL SINGER

Daniel Singer is The Nation*'s Europe correspondent.*

Reluctant Allies

The Bush Administration's anti-Iraq coalition is looking increasingly fragile, with the pro-United States Arab camp in particular decidedly reluctant to back a military option against Saddam Hussein. President Hosni Mubarak has pointedly declared that Egyptian troops would enter Kuwait only as a peacekeeping force and proposed a three-month waiting period before force is seriously considered. He fears that once thousands of Iraqis are killed by American bombs and rockets, public opinion in Egypt would turn violently anti-American, seriously threatening his regime.

The state-controlled news media in Syria continue to portray the Syrian troops in Saudi Arabia as a force stationed there to prevent a fight between two Arab states. Setting aside his hatred of Syrian President Hafez al-Assad, Saddam has meticulously refrained from criticizing his longstanding rival. This has brought him political gains. In Syrian cities one can see pro-Saddam graffiti and hear praise of him in conversations: This is an unprecedented phenomenon. Assad must therefore know that were a war to erupt in the gulf, causing immense damage to Iraq and its people, his citizens would be likely to go beyond defacing walls.

King Hassan of Morocco appears equally alarmed about the outbreak of hostilities. How else is one to explain his

(*Continued on Page 736*)

★

Worth Fighting For

A citizen has trouble keeping track
Of why we may obliterate Iraq.
First Baker brands as vicious and obscene
The thought we'd fight to keep cheap gasoline.
Then Bush says oil's the issue. (We don't mind
A war for oil until it gets refined?)
He says he'll take the steps that he must take:
Our very way of life is what's at stake.
(Our "way of life"! Whatever could that mean?
Unless, of course, it means cheap gasoline.)
But then Bush says we have to draw the line
We should have drawn in 1939.
Aggression—naked—we have always loathed.
(We overlook aggression fully clothed.)
We must remove, and preferably feet first,
A monster worse than Hitler at his worst.
Then Baker, like a man who clean forgot
About this Hitler that we had to swat,
Explains we must prevail at any cost
Because if not some jobs here could be lost.
If fighting for our jobs is now the plan,
You'd think our troops would go invade Japan.
A citizen has trouble keeping track
Of why we may obliterate Iraq.

Calvin Trillin

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MINORITY REPORT.

CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS

It is irritating to be told, by pundits of almost every stripe and tinge, that the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait is the first "post-cold war" imbroglio. It is, certainly, the first post-cold war annexation. But in a very short while we shall be observing the first anniversary of the United States' invasion of Panama, which was the first and only armed, unilateral intervention by a superpower to have occurred since the fall of the Berlin wall.

I'm making the point not to stress any latent "moral equivalence" between the Iraqi attack and the American one but to suggest that the Panama episode contains unlearned lessons for America's adventure in the gulf. Almost one year later, we still do not know what Noriega "has" on the U.S. government, or what the U.S. government "has" on him. Nor do we know how many Panamanian civilians perished in the fighting. Before embarking on another war with an official friend turned official enemy, it might be good to have an accounting of what happened last time the global cop took a swing down the beat.

Some observers, peering forward into the future of "Desert Shield," count only potential American casualties as real. Others wonder, hearts bleeding mightily, whether or not "we" might end up killing rather a lot of Iraqis. Take your pick. In Panama, the figures in both cases have been doctored and suppressed. (My comrade Alexander Cockburn will be dilating more scientifically on this next week.)

Take, first, American military casualties. A Pentagon report was commissioned, for internal purposes, after *Newsweek* alleged in June that as many as 60 percent of injuries and nine of the twenty-three deaths were the result of what is known as "friendly fire." This report now discloses that the Pentagon misled even Secretary of Defense Cheney, let alone the rest of us. Of the 312 soldiers listed as wounded, seventy-two were injured in parachute jumps rather than by the Panamanian Defense Forces. The final death toll turns out to be twenty-six, not twenty-three as originally claimed, and six of those may have been the result of American fire. In all, according to the Pentagon report, 34 percent of U.S. casualties were occasioned by friendly fire or accidents—a substantial proportion for an operation against a small country—and the military originally sought to minimize the fact by claiming, in an earlier memo, that no soldiers had been killed by friendly fire and only five wounded by it. Those findings deserve to be set against some recent optimistic babble about "surgical strikes" in Mesopotamia.

Turning to the civilian figures, one finds the usual disproportion that is encountered in the study of colonial war. The official U.S. total for Panamanian civilian deaths is 202. An astonishing segment on the CBS program *60 Minutes*, which aired on September 30 last, shows this to be an obscene falsification. Readers ought to write in and get the transcript for themselves, but let me give some of its salient points.

Reporter Mike Wallace found a woman named Isabel Coro, whose occupation since last Christmas has been the finding and exhuming of mass graves. She has dug up two. One of them contained her "missing" father. Panamanian officials say there are six or seven more such graves. Coro's guess is that approximately 4,000 Panamanians were slain in those few days. In one proven instance, more than 100 bodies were found in one place—the Garden of Peace cemetery in Panama City. A nervous cemetery official was interviewed:

> Reporter: Who are they?
> Official: Well I don't know exactly. They asked me the favor to bury here, and the army and the government has all the information.
> Reporter: Are they all victims of the——
> Official: I think so.
> Reporter: shootings?
> Official: I think so. I don't know, exactly, because it's not my——

We've all met officials like that, and read about them too. Of course it's not his . . . He has a job to do, and a family to feed and orders to obey. The job of finding out who lies in the Garden of Peace belongs to the U.S. Congress and the press, both of which endorsed "Operation Just Cause" and now want to let the grass grow over the mass graves.

Getting a bit nettled by what he was finding, Wallace questioned the Defense Department, whose commitment to candor is measurable from its initial report of a handful of American casualties. As Wallace reported:

> What does the Pentagon say about all this? They sent us back to Panama to talk to the U.S. military command there. The U.S. military command there bucked us back to the Pentagon. Nobody, it seems, wants to talk about it.

Two brothers, John and David Cienaga, did want to talk about it. Their father was once C.I.A. station chief in Panama. John has been a Ranger captain and an Army lawyer. Both are attorneys representing a group of victims of Operation Just Cause. As John Cienaga puts it:

> Clearly, senior officers felt—or whatever leadership decided to proceed with the invasion felt—that the high level of civilian casualties was justified, or merited, in light of whatever military objective they saw they were satisfying.

David Cienaga discusses a report, made by an Army casualty officer, that acknowledges the possibility of very heavy casualties in the Chorrillo section of Panama City "where about 10 blocks of high-density housing or slums were destroyed as a result of our ops." Finally, though Washington has been known to compensate noncombatants in Santo Domingo, Vietnam and Grenada, it refuses to do so in this instance. A Pentagon memo says baldly:

> Payment of individual combat-related claims under a program similar to the USAID program in Grenada would not be in the best interest of the Department of Defense of the U.S. because of the potentially huge number of such claims.

The deceptive public relations figure of 202 deaths is neither huge nor does it have the potential to become huge. At least the actuarial section of the Pentagon cannot lie. It had better not, as the gravedigging business goes into "potential" high gear.

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WATCHING RIGHTS.

ARYEH NEIER

Luis Patti, deputy police chief of Pilar, an affluent town near Buenos Aires, has become a celebrity in Argentina. Indeed, some journalists and political leaders are calling him a hero, more than a thousand citizens of Pilar have demonstrated to support him and even President Carlos Saúl Menem has praised Patti as someone who "does everything well."

What did Patti do to deserve such acclaim? He tortured prisoners by applying an electric cattle prod to their genitals. For this a magistrate jailed him. Now the magistrate, Raúl Borrino, is being vilified while Patti is lionized.

I learned about the Patti case when I returned to New York at the end of October from a visit to India to examine conditions in prisons and police lockups. Although I knew something in advance about the Indian police, I was startled to discover how commonly they torture detainees. After all, like Argentina today, India is a free country—the world's largest democracy, as it is frequently described. Abuses of authority are investigated and exposed by the press, denounced by civil liberties groups and regularly condemned by the staunchly independent judiciary. It is not difficult in India to find out about torture, and those who publicly deplore such abuses are themselves institutionally protected against reprisals. Yet sunlight, which advocates of human rights like to think of as the best disinfectant (in Justice Brandeis's words), is not doing the job.

One of the small organizations in India that promote human rights, the People's Union for Democratic Rights, recently published a study of deaths in police custody in New Delhi. The group investigated forty-eight deaths, most of persons under the age of 30. The deaths had come to light because they were reported in the press. "Most of these people died due to . . . torture," the P.U.D.R. found. "Practically every person taken to a police station in connection with some or the other offense in our country is subjected to severe beating and torture. . . . It is this process of torture, regular and systematic, whose end product is sometimes death, as in the case of these unfortunate 48 people in Delhi."

Part of the explanation for the prevalence of torture despite the exposés that India's open political system permits lies in the weakness of the country's human rights movement. The antecedents of the present-day movement go back to colonial times, when Jawaharlal Nehru was the founder and leader of the Indian Civil Liberties Union. With independence and Nehru's emergence as Prime Minister, the Civil Liberties Union expired, at his urging. It was no longer needed, he reportedly told his colleagues. Presumably he assumed not only that his government would respect civil liberties but also that the sum and substance of the civil liberties struggle in India consisted in protecting the rights of those advocating independence.

The human rights movement in India was reborn in the mid-1970s when Nehru's daughter, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, declared an emergency and jailed thousands of her political opponents. As in colonial times, the movement sprang from the same social milieu as did those being jailed. The organizations that operate today, among them the People's Union for Democratic Rights and the People's Union for Civil Liberties, are outgrowths of that period, though there has been no repetition of the imprisonment of large numbers of mainstream peaceful dissenters. Accordingly, the groups now draw support only from those educated middle-class Indians who concern themselves with abuses against crime suspects from the lower classes (the latter account for virtually all the victims of police torture), and with abuses against those suspected of supporting separatist struggles in the Punjab, Kashmir and Assam, where noncombatants are being slaughtered and their communities destroyed. This movement does fine work but it lacks the mass public support needed for effective campaigns to curb abuses.

In Argentina and in other Latin American countries, such as Brazil—where torture in police custody is as commonplace as in India—it seems as if it were only yesterday that the era of political repression came to an end. That era lasted much longer than Mrs. Gandhi's emergency in India, it cut a wider swath through middle-class society and it was marked by more physical violence than in India, where the class background of those imprisoned protected them from the treatment that Indian authorities dealt to the lower classes. Yet the middle-class public in Latin American countries that had made concern for human rights an important factor in ousting the military regimes that dominated the region until the mid-1980s has demonstrated little interest in police torture and summary executions of poor people suspected of crime.

In the United States, torture in police custody has largely been eliminated over the past two decades or so. One reason is that the civil liberties movement here, which grew out of concern for the rights of political dissenters during World War I and during the red scare that followed the war, has been periodically reinvigorated by its defense of other political dissenters, as during the McCarthy era and during the Vietnam War years, and also by its adoption of such causes as reproductive freedom. In blending efforts on behalf of those with whom the middle class can identify with efforts to defend the rights of those as unpopular as suspects in common crime cases, and in arguing more or less persuasively that the rights of all are connected, an organization such as the American Civil Liberties Union continues to attract enough public support to be effective in protecting the rights of people who might otherwise arouse little sympathy from the organization's own constituency.

Internationally, the human rights movement focuses on abuses in dictatorships and in those countries, such as Guatemala, where the military wields most power despite the advent of some forms of democratic government. A decade ago Jeane Kirkpatrick provoked a debate over whether human rights abuses under totalitarian regimes were more intractable than those committed by authoritarian governments. Yet, as the example of India suggests, abuses such as torture are as entrenched in some democracies as under either variety of political repression.

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ARTICLES.

MEMORIES OF TWO COUNTRIES

My Vietnam, My America

ANDREW LAM

Sometimes the following scene emerges from my Vietnamese childhood: I am sitting in a slow-moving jeep watching Christmas decorations lolling from an old thatched roof, under which a G.I. bargains with a Saigon bar girl in a green miniskirt. I hear the murmur of wet tires on a flooded road, the G.I.'s laughter and the girl's flirting curses. The deal is struck. Was there in that muggy night the scent of the soldier's strong foreign cologne? His hand reaches for her. She, cursing still, gears herself for the embrace.

Uncle Sam's soldiering nephew slept once with Miss Saigon, and in the morning both had changed. One goes home haunted by a turbulent love affair, the other, in the aftermath of her tragic ending, dreams of a new beginning in America. If Vietnam has become, to Americans, a buzzword for ill-fought wars, a metaphor for disaster, America has become, to the Vietnamese, the symbol of freedom and happiness. Yes, Vietnam is independent at last. But the Vietnamese, impoverished and oppressed, are far from happiness.

Last spring, when I visited Hong Kong's Whitehead Detention Centre, some Vietnamese detainees showed me a statue of Lady Liberty made out of tin. They said she symbolizes their aspirations toward freedom. Badly copied and smeared by rain, she stood four feet tall on the rooftop of barrack 24, section 8, shaking in the wind like an old banana leaf.

"America?" said a teenager in section 8—he is too young to remember the Vietnam War but old enough to have fought in and escaped from the war in Cambodia—"America is paradise." And he speculated in his Hanoi accent, "There is no sufferings in America." It is true—from a fleeing refugee's point of view. America becomes anything Vietnam can't be; it is open to interpretation. In America, you can avoid Khmer Rouge mines that blow off your legs and reduce you to begging on Saigon's sidewalks. In America there are no re-education camps and malaria-infested New Economic Zones where you are forced to grow yams and corn from the hard, bitter soil.

"In America," a Vietnamese who recently arrived in the United States writes home to his impoverished cousins, "you can cook without fire, get money from machines, send letters over telephone wires, watch the world via satellites, drive for kilometers on well-paved roads." In America your children grow taller, smarter, more handsome; best of all, the government leaves you alone.

In the dark of night, thousands of Vietnamese climb on board old fishing boats for the perilous journey toward the American G.I.s' wondrous home.

Uncle Sam's soldiering nephews, on the other hand, came home traumatized. Now when Americans speak of foreign ventures we are more prudent. The painful memories of Vietnam come back to haunt us and we instinctively ask, "Is it going to be another Vietnam?" Vietnam, in effect, has become a vault filled with tragic metaphors for every American to use.

Ho Chi Minh, My Lai massacre, Kent State, Saigon, Hanoi, the domino theory: Those, among other names and places, are listed in the book *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know*, by E.D. Hirsch Jr. But what does every American know? Americans shrug. Vietnam is an unhealed wound, the stuff bad dreams are made of, a legacy of defeat and shame. And so on.

"When Americans say Vietnam, they don't mean Vietnam," my uncle complains. He once served as a pilot in the Vietnamese Air Force. Americans don't take defeat and bad memories very well, he says. They try to escape them. Americans make a habit of blaming small countries for the bad things that happen to the United States: cocaine from Colombia, AIDS from Haiti, a nasty flu from Hong Kong, hurricanes from the Caribbean.

But Vietnam—well, Vietnam is special. What Henry Kissinger described as a "fourth-rate power" has cracked our ivory tower and plagued the American psyche; that hell in a small place devastated the bright and shiny citadel. For the first time in American history, we are caught in the past, haunted by unanswerable questions, confronted with a tragic ending.

Hollywood, however, rushes to the rescue. It is free with its various interpretations. *Apocalypse Now* describes an American's mythical adventures in a tropic jungle, where he confronts other Americans who have been transformed into insane barbarians. *The Deer Hunter* shows a game of Russian roulette being played out for money between an American and some Vietnamese. It suggests Americans and Vietnamese are equally insane. Insanity explains away otherwise complicated plots and is what we plead in America when we commit hideous crimes. *Tour of Duty* returns to the metaphor of that brutal embrace: Uncle Sam's nephews raping Miss Saigon and then blowing her brains out. Sylvester Stallone carried the war one step further. As Rambo shooting down faceless Vietnamese and sleeping with beautiful and mysterious Miss Saigon, Stallone led you to believe that he had won the lost war for America and restored its pride. Audiences cheered him on.

I know a Vietnamese man who makes money acting in Hollywood. He had survived the war and the perilous journey on the South China Sea to come to America. Now he plays Vietcong, ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) soldiers, civilians. He is a great actor. No one recognizes his face. Time and again he dies, spurting fake blood from

Andrew Lam, an associate editor of Pacific News Service, was born in Vietnam and came to the United States in 1975.

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his torso and heart. At other times he screams in pain, reinterpreting his own past. "Hollywood loves me," he jokes. "I die well."

Watching such movies, Vietnamese old enough to remember the war giggle uncomfortably. These naïve interpretations of the conflict little resemble their own past. Some are enraged, but many are resigned. For what they know and won't admit to the American audience is that for them history is a series of personal impressions. Facts and details and analysis can't capture the truth about Vietnam any more than wildly fabricated war flicks can. Instead, Vietnamese living in America tell their children ghost stories and share their memories of the monsoon rains and harvest festivals (I store in my brain a million of those memories and myths, none of which have anything to do with America's involvement in the war, but that's another story).

Vietnam-America. Whatever happened to that covetous embrace? America-Vietnam. What became of that illegitimate marriage?

Recently I read that a dilapidated boat carrying refugees from Vietnam entered Malaysian waters with a peculiar sign hanging on its side. It read, "USA Remains on My Boat." Bones, bags of G.I. bones. Missing remnants from that vicariously lost war, now found and carefully washed by impoverished Vietnamese hands. They hope to bargain the bones for passage to the promised land.

"A set of G.I. bones is worth a whole family's tickets to the United States," goes the gossip in Saigon. Uncle Sam denies such handsome rewards, but Miss Saigon and her overabundant children dream on: Normalization with the United States is at hand, Americans will send aid, President Bush will lift the trade embargo, Hanoi is building an American Embassy, American delegations are here to excavate oilfields in the Mekong Delta. A few Vietnam vets return, a couple of clinics are restored, but otherwise nothing happens. Still, there is the faint smell of the American dollar bill, the familiar scent of a G.I.'s cologne.

I remember the Americans in Vietnam. My father was an officer in the ARVN during the war. Americans were his allies, Communists were his foes. Among the things we burned near the end of the war were self-incriminating photos of our American friends. One photo showed my father and his American advisers looking at a military map. There was a picture of my brother standing next to Robert Mitchum. Another photo showed Joanna, an American social worker, smiling sweetly next to my mother. Those pictures and many more went up in smoke to disclaim our haphazard and estranged friendship (although we later fled to America and became Americans).

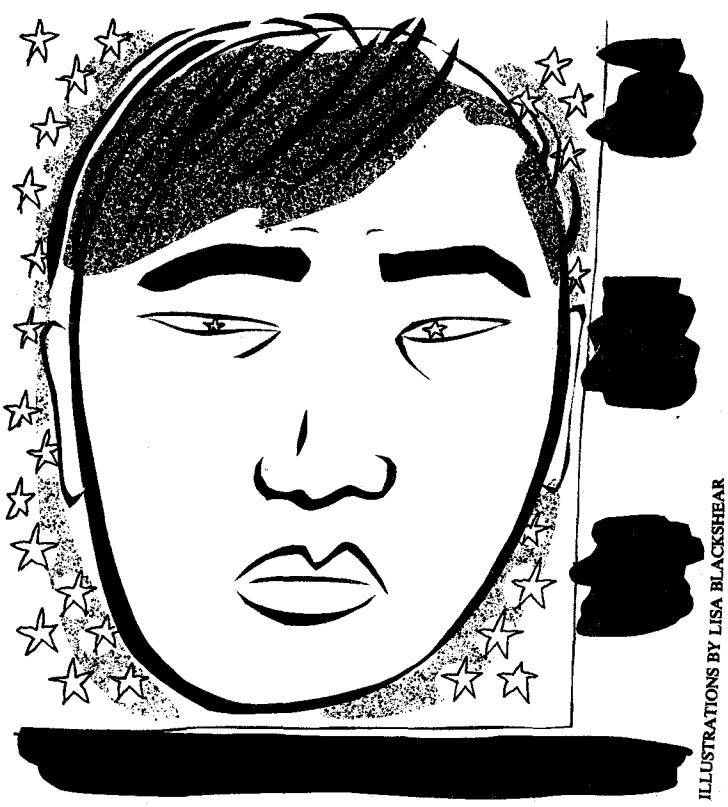
"Your country didn't deserve all the shit from us," said the pool man at my parents' suburban home. A Vietnam vet, he wore a cap with the word "Danang" on it. "I love your country," he continued. "I had a wonderful time there. If I had money I'd take a trip from Hanoi to Saigon." To another Vietnam vet who was panhandling in Berkeley, I gave a dollar bill and told him I came from Vietnam. He threw the money back at me.

Sometimes I am asked, How well do Americans understand the Vietnam War? I don't know, I answer, but there is this wall in Washington. And you can sense its truth when you are there. All year long Americans come and leave poems and photos and flowers to those who died in Vietnam. Unlike all the memorials in America that depict past triumphs or happy endings, this dark wall stands alone and sacrosanct. If there are ghosts in America, they would comfortably congregate there, for it is the only American place of tragic consequences, this wall that over time has evolved in a tradition similar to that of a Vietnamese shrine.

My last memory of Vietnam: April 29, 1975, one day before Saigon fell to the advancing North Vietnamese Army. I was 11. My family and I boarded a C-130 with other panicked refugees and fled to the Philippines. My father gave the American pilot a gift he had received from an American friend: a silver gun encased in a hollow Bible. The war ended the next day.

Vicky, a social worker who assists boat people in Hong Kong, traveled to the Mekong Delta to understand her clients' past. She encountered a boy who sat on a water buffalo amid a golden rice field. But instead of playing the traditional bamboo flute he had a ghetto blaster playing the songs of the Eurythmics. "What do you make of that?" Vicky asked me.

"USA Remains on My Boat," answers the wooden sign. It tells more than it had intended to. And perhaps Stallone is right. Americans did indeed win the war. Vietnamese are ready to be Americans. Vietnamese want VCRs, democracy, Levi's jeans, freedom, Toyotas, happiness. The Vietnamese government offers the Cam Ranh Bay naval base to welcome Uncle Sam again, if he ever wants to come back. Miss Saigon winks.



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And me. Sometimes I go to a Vietnamese restaurant in San Francisco's Tenderloin district. I sit and stare at two wooden clocks hanging on the wall. The left one is carved in the shape of a voluptuous S: the map of Vietnam. The one on the right is hewed in the shape of a deformed tooth: the map of America. Ticktock, ticktock. They run at different times. Ticktock, ticktock. I was born a Vietnamese. Ticktock, ticktock. I am reborn an American. Ticktock, ticktock. I am of one soul. Ticktock, ticktock. Two hearts. □

LET 'EM EAT PESTICIDES

Taking the Worry Out of Food

NANCY WATZMAN

If you turned on the TV this Thanksgiving, chances are you saw a commercial designed to give you the freedom to stop thinking: First there's wheat waving in the wind, then an elderly man and woman reaching out for each other's hands. A church bell rings, a wholesome-looking woman waves from her produce stand and suddenly families are everywhere, embracing one another and passing babies around. A woman presents a succulent turkey to clapping relatives gathered around a food-laden table. And all this happens to the strains of "Amazing Grace."

The commercial, sponsored by "all the people who put food on your table," as represented by the Agriculture Council of America, is part of a new multimillion-dollar public relations campaign, dubbed "Food Watch," to convince the American people that the food they eat is safe. The A.C.A. is a nonprofit trade association that represents the food and agriculture industries. "[We want] to give the beleaguered wife and mom a pat on the back and tell her she's been doing the right thing," explains J.R. Palmer, an A.C.A. representative, in a fundraising videotape for the campaign obtained by Public Citizen.

A.C.A.'s Food Watch campaign is the offspring of a recent worryfest among industry groups and government agencies that criticize public interest groups' efforts to publicize the dangers of pesticides, food additives and other threats to public health. Industry groups fear they'll lose business, while government bureaucrats lament the ignorance of the unwashed mob, so easily misled by "zealots." Together, they've coined a new buzzword to describe efforts like the Food Watch campaign: "risk communication." These days a conference on food technology is not complete without sessions on risk communication—the American Chemical Society included several at its September convention, and the term was the subject of a recent report by the National Research Council, a nonprofit re-

Nancy Watzman is a policy analyst for Public Citizen's Congress Watch, a consumer and environmental organization founded by Ralph Nader in 1971.

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search organization that publishes studies on science and technology.

Too often the discussion at these events degenerates into condemnation of political action on environmental and public health issues. The ordinary citizen, the collective wisdom runs, can't possibly comprehend the complex, technical nature of debates over global warming, nuclear power, pesticide residues, garbage incinerators and toxic waste. "When one is not 'expert'—then intuitive judgments become the dominant," wrote Michael Pariza, a researcher at the University of Wisconsin's Food Research Institute, in a paper for the American Chemical Society convention. "Intuitive judgments, in turn, are shaped by a variety of factors, many of which have little or nothing to do with logic or deductive reasoning." And so, the argument goes, people overreact to some dangers and care not at all about others, and they are easily manipulated by public interest groups bent more on scaring than informing. Industry and government should therefore devote more of their energy to risk communication—telling citizens *their* version of the story in a fashion that's not too taxing to the intellect, relying upon the news media to convey the information. Risk communication, it turns out, is nothing but a fancy new label for P.R.

The problem with risk communication theory is that it naïvely assumes that government and industry will act in good faith. The National Research Council report, though written in dense bureaucratese, is rather sweet when it attempts to convince government and industry, its intended audience, that "openness is the surest policy" when controversy erupts. Immense political and economic pressures on government and industry make such a feel-good policy laudable but rarely achievable—at least, not without prodding from concerned citizens and public interest groups.

Consider the Food Watch campaign, hardly an example of logic, deductive reasoning or openness. In a fundraising video the A.C.A. leadership complains that the public has been misled by "a group of well-meaning but overzealous individuals" whose "thoughts and opinions" on pesticides and food additives "are beginning to find their way into the minds of housewives and the desks of legislators." The only recourse, they say, is to rally the "entire food chain" (not, in this case, microorganisms, mosquitoes and so on up to mammals but rather food growers, processors and distributors) to convince Americans the food supply is safe, using advertisements like the Thanksgiving commercial and others that are less vague and more pernicious.

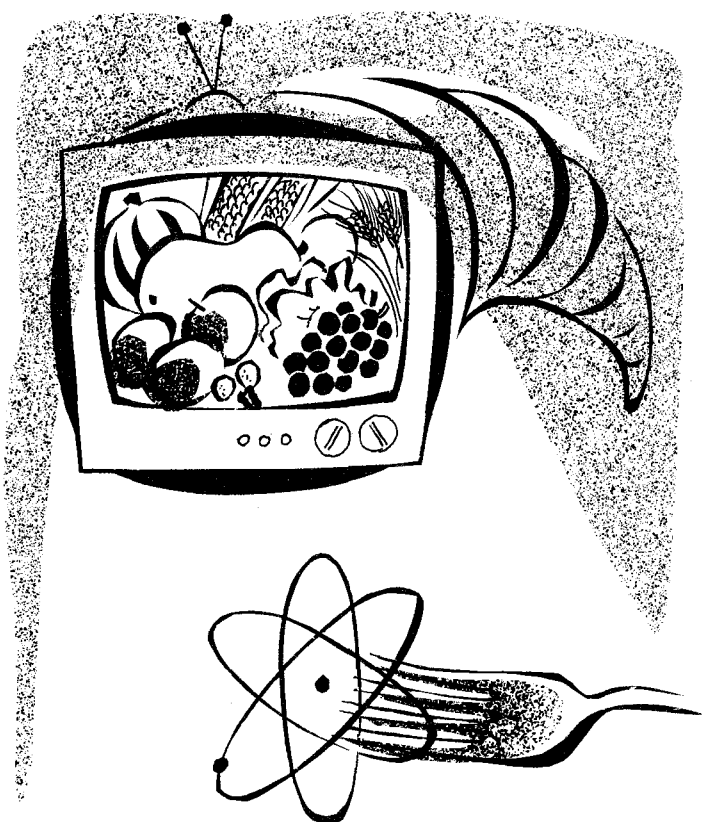
One proposed print campaign features photographs of starving African children over slogans such as "Each year 15 million children die of starvation. That makes us the most endangered species." "We can even be more emotional," says Palmer in the A.C.A. fundraising video, "by asking . . . if we, the best-fed, best-nourished people on earth, have a right to decide how much food people in the rest of the world get to eat, deciding who will live and who will die." Palmer does not explain, however, exactly how the A.C.A. or other industry groups are devoting resources to eradicating world hunger—or what pesticides and food additives have to do with famine.

In another print campaign, aimed at "the American housewife . . . [who] doesn't have the time to read extensively on food safety and nutrition," a white American girl stands tall above an Asian boy and girl, with the caption, "The quality and standards of our food have gotten a lot higher." Implicit racism aside, there's an oblique claim being made that food technology has helped make Americans grow taller. Yet it's doubtful that pesticides and food additives have contributed much to the height of Americans.

There's not a word in any of these advertisements about the actual issues involved in debates over food safety, the ones that scientists, industry and consumer advocates tend to lock horns over: the dangers posed by pesticides and hormones in food, or whether or not such chemicals are necessary to make agriculture economically viable.

That the so-called food chain represented by the A.C.A. would present its point of view in such a fashion should come as no surprise. For farmers and other agriculture-dependent business people, the idea that the pesticides, hormones and food additives they have relied on for years may become unacceptable to the public poses what seems to be an industry-threatening dilemma. Their interests and concerns are clear—the problem is, they don't necessarily coincide with those of consumers.

Government officials, while free of some of the economic pressure that groups like the A.C.A. face, hardly make public health policy decisions by depending upon cold, crisp, logical analyses. During the Reagan era, for example, in the mad rush to deregulate every industry possible, the Department of Agriculture agreed to let poultry companies take over responsibility for inspecting their own products.



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Companies had already been allowed to employ new processing technology that may have made poultry more vulnerable to contamination. According to the Government Accountability Project, a watchdog organization that represents whistleblowing poultry inspectors, these changes are responsible for higher levels of contamination. Recent studies show that the number of salmonella-infested chickens leaving plants has increased; the Agriculture Department estimates that 58 percent of chickens processed in the South last year were contaminated. Yet the birds still get the federal stamp of approval. The policy decisions that allowed this increase in contamination levels had more to do with political ideology than science, yet the credo of risk communication would require Agriculture Department officials to tell the public that risks had been considered and that poultry remains safe for consumers.

In fact, the realm of risk assessment—the various analyses government does to determine whether, for example, a pesticide is dangerous to the public—is notoriously murky. Science has not yet deciphered the mysteries of carcinogenesis and therefore relies upon somewhat crude methods to determine whether chemicals are dangerous. When the Environmental Protection Agency sets out to determine whether a pesticide is carcinogenic, for example, it tests the chemical on rats, mice and other animals. The chemical is given to the animals, and if they develop cancer, scientists estimate what the corresponding toxic level would be for humans. This extrapolation method is far from perfect, although most scientists agree it's the best available at present. These are just the tests for cancer. The E.P.A. doesn't even require testing for other dangers such as effects on the nervous and immune systems. Yet the agency will often announce that a pesticide is perfectly safe even if much remains unknown about it. "These numbers are very ephemeral," says a government consultant who cleans up Superfund sites and whose company was once commissioned to conduct risk analysis on a particular chemical. "Yet when it comes time to tell the public, the numbers are communicated as fact. That's the step that gives me pause."

What's the typical consumer to do, as government and industry devote increasing attention to communicating risks in ways that may have as much to do with politics as science? While it's true that the average citizen may not be well versed in the slope curves, exponential expressions and acronyms that make up the risk-assessment lingo, that doesn't mean that he or she can't understand the basic issues at stake in a local debate over an incinerator or the use of pesticides in schools.

As long as scientific knowledge remains incomplete, citizens may decide that it makes a lot more sense to devote energy to a recycling program than to risk the unknown effects of an incinerator. Sure, the consumer may not be worrying in perfect proportion to the statistical hazards—maybe he or she is at greater risk of getting hit by a car than of contracting cancer from pesticide-laden broccoli. So what? Better the consumer should question experts about a whole range of perils than depend on government and industry to spoon-feed incomplete information as if it were fact. □

THE COURT'S NEW DOCTRINE

Free Speech For the Rich

FRANK ASKIN

Forty-seven years ago Justice Hugo Black, writing for a majority of the Supreme Court, announced that the First Amendment's guarantee of freedom of speech extended special solicitude to the "poorly financed causes of little people." The present majority seems to have turned that principle on its head. Lest civil libertarians be deceived about the current vitality of the First Amendment as a result of such salutary victories as the Court's 5-to-4 decision in the flag-burning case, they had better take a closer look at the Court's opinions concerning the place and manner of the exercise of First Amendment rights. The new doctrine poses particular difficulties for grass-roots organizations even while it carves out a preferred status under the amendment for the lavishly financed causes of fat cats.

Indeed, William Rehnquist soared to heights of constitutional eloquence in 1984 when he wrote the decision striking down Congress's efforts to equalize the volume of the political voices of the "little people" with those of the rich in *Federal Election Commission v. National Conservative Political Action Committee (NCPAC)*. Rehnquist said Congress could not restrict the independent expenditures made by political action committees in behalf of candidates who chose to accept public financing. He likened the spending cap to a regulation allowing a speaker in a public hall to express his ideas while denying him the use of an amplifying system—even if only the rich could afford an amplifier and could then use it to drown out the not-so-rich.

Ignoring the obvious, Rehnquist reminded us that the decision would apply not only to the multimillion-dollar war chests of the corporate and other special-interest PACs but also to "informal discussion groups that solicit neighborhood contributions to publicize their views about a particular" candidate. Anatole France would no doubt be pleased to know that in the United States people who sleep under bridges can have their own PACs, which may spend unlimited amounts in support of their favored candidates.

The decision follows a consistent series of decisions by the Burger-Rehnquist Courts expanding the free-speech rights of banks, private corporations and millionaires. During the past two decades, the Court has upheld the right of banks to spend money to influence the outcome of public referendums; sustained the right of millionaires to spend unlimited personal funds on their own elections while the law sharply limits the amount of campaign contributions to other candidates; affirmed the right of utility companies to include with the monthly bills to their customers statements on issues of

Frank Askin is a professor of law at Rutgers Law School and general counsel of the American Civil Liberties Union.

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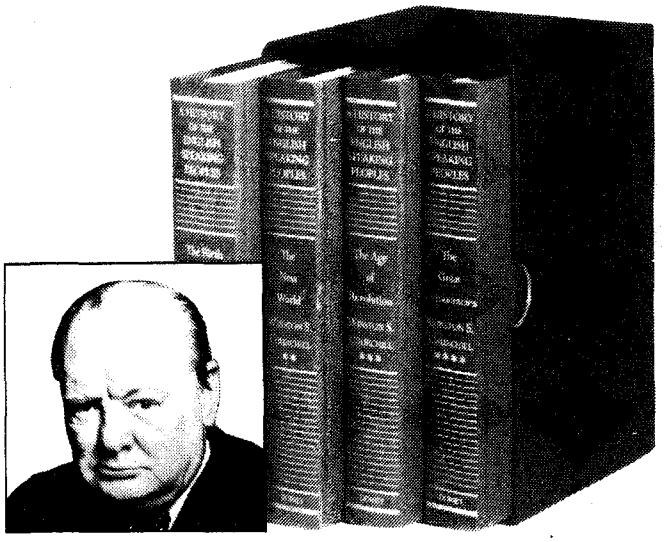

1939. Winston Churchill exists in a political limbo. Far from the levers of power, his urgent warnings about Hitler all but ignored, he concentrates his energies on completing his *History of the English Speaking People.*

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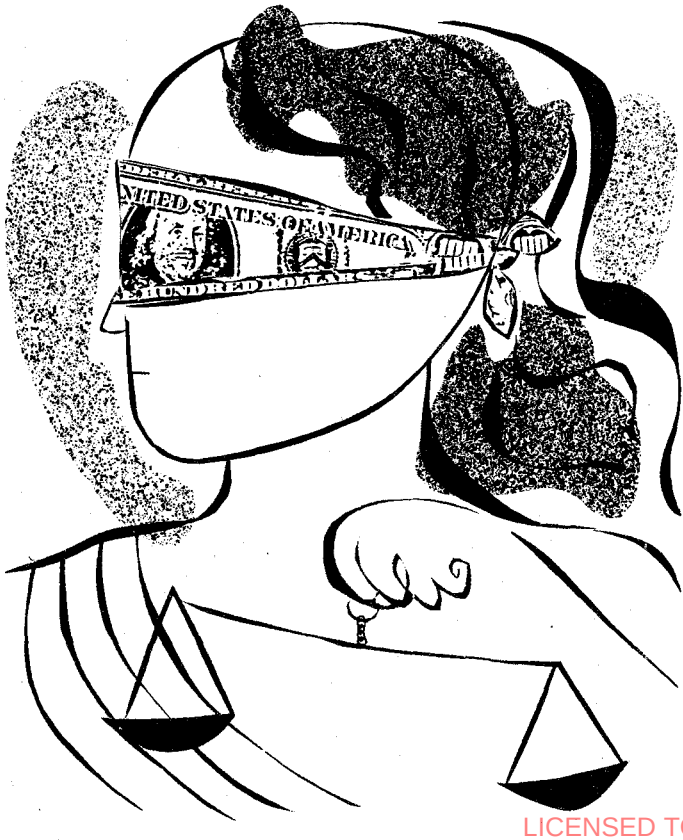
public policy; invalidated a use tax imposed by the state of Minnesota on the cost of paper and ink products consumed in the production of a daily newspaper; and generally protected newspapers and magazines from ruinous libel judgments.

The only case that appears to have deviated from this pattern is last term's 6-to-3 decision upholding a Michigan law prohibiting corporate spending in support of candidates for public office. However, it is unclear how long that ruling will last now that Justice William Brennan has been replaced by David Souter.

I do not mean to suggest that all of these cases protecting the speech of the well to do were wrongly decided. They can each find support among civil libertarians. What is startling is the disparity between these decisions and others of the Burger-Rehnquist Courts involving the exercise of free-speech rights by those "poorly financed causes of little people" mentioned by Justice Black. Somehow or other, when those kinds of cases are brought to the Court, the response is more grudging, with the majority straining mightily to find justification for government restriction. The major intellectual tools honed by the conservative Justices to perform this task have been the "public forum" and "state action" doctrines.

The latter was employed in an early Burger Court decision involving the right to distribute leaflets at privately owned shopping centers, a forum of obvious utility for grass-roots organizing by poorly funded groups. Reversing a prior decision of the Warren Court, the new majority held that shopping malls, despite having replaced public town squares in much of the nation, were private property not subject to the commands of the federal Constitution (since then, a few state courts have decided, under their own constitutions, that malls must accommodate free speech).



The conservative majority's development of "public forum" doctrine has further eroded the ability of poorly funded causes and organizations to proselytize. The Burger-Rehnquist Courts have ruled:

§ that the managers of a publicly operated state fair could limit the activities of religious solicitors to an assigned booth and bar them from the crowded midway;

§ that homeless people could be prevented from conducting a symbolic sleep-in at the public park opposite the White House;

§ that the federal government could prohibit the deposit of leaflets and circulars in the mailboxes of private homes;

§ that the Combined Federal Campaign, which facilitated charitable contributions by federal employees through payroll deductions, could exclude from participation advocacy groups such as the N.A.A.C.P. and the Sierra Club (that decision was subsequently overruled by Congress);

§ and, just last summer, that the sidewalk in front of a post office could be placed off-limits to political solicitation.

In addition to state action and public forum doctrines, the conservative majority has also manipulated what it calls "time, place and manner" rules to uphold "neutral" restrictions upon certain types of communication. Thus it held that the City of Los Angeles could prohibit the posting of campaign posters on public property such as trees and utility poles. The primary justification for such restrictions has been the availability of alternative channels of communication for the intended message. That reasoning no doubt refers to the fact that the homeless and the poorly financed are entitled, under the Court's other line of cases, to publish tax-free newspapers or combine their meager resources to set up political action committees that can spend unlimited amounts on the purchase of television spot announcements.

The right wing's preference for the speech rights of the haves is further illustrated by the recent decision of the Reagan-appointed Federal Communications Commission to repeal the fairness doctrine, which occasionally provided a free right-of-response by an underfunded group, as an infringement on the rights of the owners of the airwaves. While that decision has not yet been affirmed by the Supreme Court, its expressed concern for the First Amendment rights of the corporate community is certainly in keeping with the First Amendment jurisprudence of the Rehnquist Court.

We can only surmise why current right-wing jurisprudence is so protective of full amplification for the voices of the rich and so indifferent to the practical hurdles faced by the less affluent in making their voices heard. Justice Black and his brethren accurately recognized half a century ago whose "microphones" would be shut off if government bodies were allowed to restrict soliciting, leafleting and postering. "Freedom" of the airwaves and of the press and freedom of check writing are not adequate substitutes so far as the less privileged are concerned.

Maybe what's lacking on the current Supreme Court is men and women who came out of grass-roots citizens' movements and learned firsthand what it's like to try to propagate a message when the only tools at one's disposal are a copying machine, paints, posterboard and shoe leather. □

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Potomac Pun-ditry

PHILIP M. STERN

★

The following overheard interchange between two C.I.A. agents concerning the situation in the Middle East was made available to The Nation *in a basement garage. We will call these agents A and B, both for reasons of security and to protect the shameless.*

A: The main danger for America in the Middle East, I think, is to be perceived as a paper Tigris. It didn't look good for our President, in the midst of this crisis, to be off playing Gulf.

B: Yasir, I agree with that. It made it look like he's a Bush-over. It's not Kuwait the image we should be projecting. He should have cut short his vacation.

A: Yeah, Iran that one up the flagpole, but his staff all opposed the idea to Amman. "Pérez the thought," they all said. For a while, I was banished to de Cuéllar.

B: Ibn Saud, you were absolutely right. My own prescription is, Better be safe than Saudi. Don't get the Jiddas and don't make any Saddam moves. Instead, just let one Cheney of events lead to another. And always, always move forward. Never Mubarak.

A: Yes, but at the same time, don't be aFahd to negotiate, even though we might sometimes say, "Well, Egypt us that time."

B: It will be Assad day for America when we hesitate to bargain. Diplomacy's the only way to avoid putting ourselves between Iraq and a hard place.

★

The following conversation between two U.S. senators took place in the Senate cloakroom. The two senators will be labeled A and B to protect the shameless.

A: Garn it all, we can't seem to get a Lott done around here. I wonder what could be D'Amato.

B: By George, you're right. Something always seems to get Inouye. Do you suppose it's the Pressler exerted by the special-interest groups? They sure pack a Wallop. Why, they exact such Pryor commitments that they make a person Kerrey water on both shoulders or, to put it another way, wear Coats of many colors. The whole thing leaves me Kohl.

A: Yes, it Burns me up too. It sure is a bitter Pell to swallow. It Daschles all the idealistic hopes I had when I first came here. The whole thing is Fowler than I had ever imagined; sometimes I Wyche I'd never come.

B: At other times, though, it Symms Wirthwhile—although not while we're Biden our time waiting for those Byrds to finish one of their Boren filibusters. That casts a Specter over the whole thing and Robbs the job of all pleasure.

A: Why can't we Hatch up a plan to solve things—put the Senator from North Carolina at the Helms, for instance?

B: Oh, no; I'll have Nunn of that, if it's all the Sam with you. That's too weak a Reid. Everyone's ox would end up Gored. I think we'd all feel like someone had invoked the Roth of Dodd.

★

The following conversation between two members of the House of Representatives concerning the recent budget negotiations took place outside the House chamber.

A: Deficit-wise, the country is in one hell of a Pickle—a Roybal mess, so to speak.

B: Under the circumstances, it would Natcherly be the height of Foley to play politics with this, even though you Republicans do seem to Vander Jagt in every rich man's garage. You don't seem to care a Whitten for the average man.

A: I'll Brooks none of your nonsense. Why, you Democrats are Gibbons away the store, and the country can't Ford it. But in the long run, you can't Hyde from the facts and drive a Traxler over the truth. Markey my words: If you continue this way, you won't be Luken so good with the American voters.

B: Don't Conyers chickens before they hatch. I'm Hughes to you Republicans trying to Snowe us Democrats. But let's not Rangel any more, lest we work ourselves into a Frenzel or, worse yet, Boggs down completely. That's the Leath we can do. By the way, where's the President?

A: You Wylie Bevill, you. Why are you Aspin me that? I think he's in the Conte house, reckoning the deficit.

B: I understand he's a Regula fella, just full of Murtha and given to Waxman enthusiastic about all sorts of things including, at times, welcoming people from foreign Scheuers.

A: That line of yours sounds to me like a transparent Russo I'll have none of it. I Schroeder known all along that I was dealing with a cheap Shuster.

B: Well, here are my final words to the Weiss: Get your ducks in a Roe; Obey the rules; Spence with formalities; when it comes to principles, abandon your policy of love 'em and Lehman but, instead, stick to your guns like a Leach; and always, always remember: different Stokes for different folks. □

Philip M. Stern is a Washington writer.

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Prague

(*Continued From Front Cover*)

In a 1984 conversation with Garton Ash, Havel offered two criteria for judging Charter 77, the human rights group that was Civic Forum's direct predecessor: "Does the Charter speak the truth? And if it does speak the truth, has this truth reached wider circles of society?" The idea of speaking the truth was crucial; it stemmed from the reality of living under a regime in which lies, hypocrisy and the separation of public and private thought and expression were the everyday rules of conduct. This was also a system in which any attempt at conventional politics was silenced, in which the behavior of the state, with its monopoly on organized politics, gave a bad name to all manifestations of power. Dissenting individuals thought of themselves as representatives of a "civil society" free of state control. It was Konrad who coined the term "antipolitics" to describe what they did. However, as Garton Ash observed pointedly in 1986, "Antipolitics is a product of living in defeat. How much would survive victory?"

The answer to Havel's first question is fairly easy: As opponents of totalitarianism the Prague intellectuals did speak the truth. Or, to be more accurate, they stood for a number of very important truths, and with great courage. But as for projecting Civic Forum's ideas to the rest of society, a year in office is enough to suggest that its antipolitics and the exercise of state power may be inherently incompatible.

At the simplest level, the problem is just a matter of who Civic Forum is. Havel (playwright) is now President; Jiri Dienstbier (journalist) is Foreign Minister; Petr Pithart (historian) is Prime Minister of the Czech—as opposed to the federal—government. The movement has never had a common, unified program. Charter 77 was an amalgam of personalities that ranged from conservative Catholics to a neo-Trotskyist, and it never set out to propose any strategy for change. This is not in any sense to condemn it: Charter 77 was what it was, and in the suffocating conditions of Czechoslovakia after the Warsaw Pact tanks had ended the Prague Spring of 1968, it's hard to see what else it could have been.

In its new incarnation as Civic Forum, the problem of disunity grew more pronounced. "The movement whose assignment is to push through fundamental reforms is becoming their gravedigger," wrote Karel Kris in a scathing commentary in the daily newspaper *Lidove Noviny*. Civic Forum "'associates' political personalities who differ so abysmally in their perception of the world and human affairs that it is often almost comical to watch the 'cooperation' within the framework of the victorious movement. There is perhaps not a single problem over which no sharp dispute develops."

There is a palpable nostalgia in Prague for the easy unity of the old days in the underground, when there was a common enemy and a common vision, at least, of the kind of society you *didn't* want to live in. Now, many of the intellectuals appear to have retreated into a world of denial and make-believe unity. Addressing the Helsinki Citizens Assembly here in October, a gathering of peace and human rights activists from both East and West, Civic Forum's Jaroslav Sabata launched into what was obviously a personally distressing post-mortem on Klaus's surprising election, in the context of a conservative surge in Poland, Hungary and Germany. Was Klaus's stunning two-thirds majority "a desire of civil society"? Sabata wondered. "Did it reflect the mood that prevails in society? Was it only temporary? Or was it the start of a course leading to a right-wing authoritarian government?" Having opened this can of worms with great precision, Sabata evidently found the contents too much for him. "This is of course only an academic question," he concluded hastily, "and I recommend that it does not occupy too much of our time."*

Klaus did not win his new post through the kind of power struggle that often characterizes postrevolutionary politics. Instead, it may be more accurate to think of him as the force of nature that rushed in to fill the vacuum, the state of entropy, that quickly came to characterize the Civic Forum government.

To say that Civic Forum has not, in Havel's words, "reached the wider circles of society" is something of an understatement. In the frenetic meetings last year in Prague's Laterna Magica theater to put together a new government, there was, to all intents and purposes, only a single worker on hand—Petr Miller—and he became Minister of Labor.

This is nothing new. The Prague Spring, after all, was predominantly a movement of reform from above, led by intellectuals. The working class made its presence felt only when the tanks had arrived. Nor have the concerns of the intellectuals arisen exclusively from their experience of Communism. Havel, Dienstbier and their colleagues are the successors to a long and honorable tradition of rational, Western-leaning intellectuals who are certainly distinctively Central European in character but may offer only the narrowest definition of what Central Europe is. Their talk of "the return to Europe," of becoming "normal" again, of "restoring Central Europe" (as opposed to Eastern Europe, a purely geopolitical construct that is no longer pertinent), has certain general characteristics. It implies a longstanding desire to be part of an intellectual axis with Vienna, Budapest and Berlin, a tendency to view the Slavic hinterlands as a region of funny costumes, quaint folk dances and unfortunate cultural prejudices. It reflects a current of cosmopolitan resistance to the exclusionary nationalisms of Central Europe—even if those nationalisms are a powerful ingredient of the present political mix (a growing Slovak separatist movement is not the least of Czechoslovakia's looming difficulties).

Outside the charmed circle of the Prague intelligentsia, there is a general hum of discontent with Civic Forum, notwithstanding the great personal regard for Havel himself. A

* Sabata's biography makes his comments especially perplexing. Like more than half the original signatories of Charter 77, he was a former Communist, having joined the party as a student in 1947. A leading figure in the Prague Spring, he was expelled from the party in 1971 and spent most of the 1970s in jail. This past June he ran for Parliament in his hometown of Brno, but his candidacy was wrecked after a nasty campaign in which right-wing rivals attacked him as an ex-Communist.

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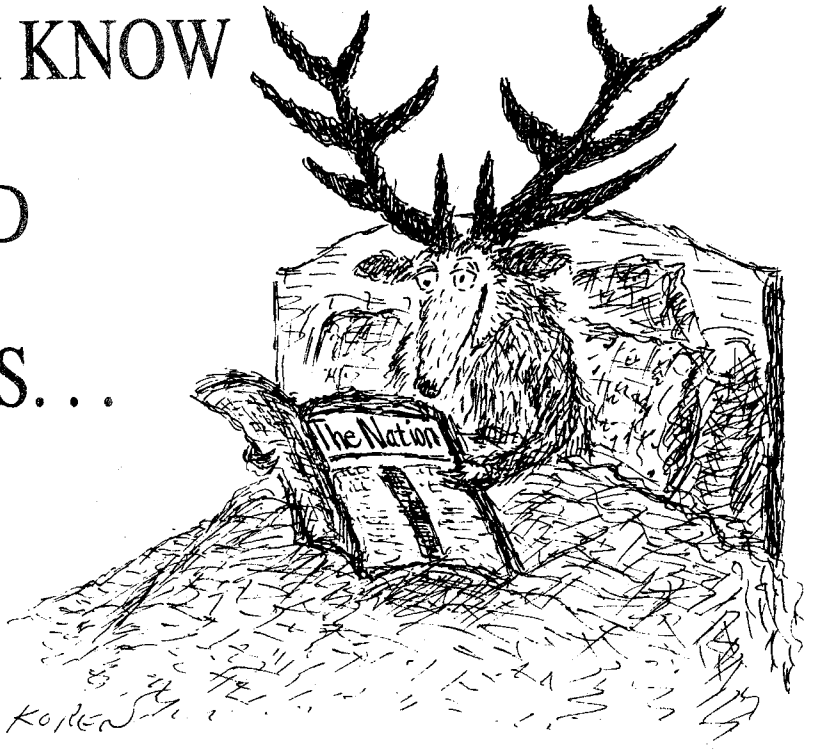

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poll conducted in early October by the Association for Independent Social Analysis showed large numbers agreeing that "Civic Forum has not managed to involve people in local political life." In a sense, it may be unfair to reproach the intellectuals for not being activist politicians, which they never claimed to be. Yet their conception of antipolitics must seem like a galling aloofness to those who toil in antiquated factories and see the same corrupt opportunists of the past still at their desks, or look in the butcher's window and see that ham and salami cost twice as much as they did before July, with worse to come in January.

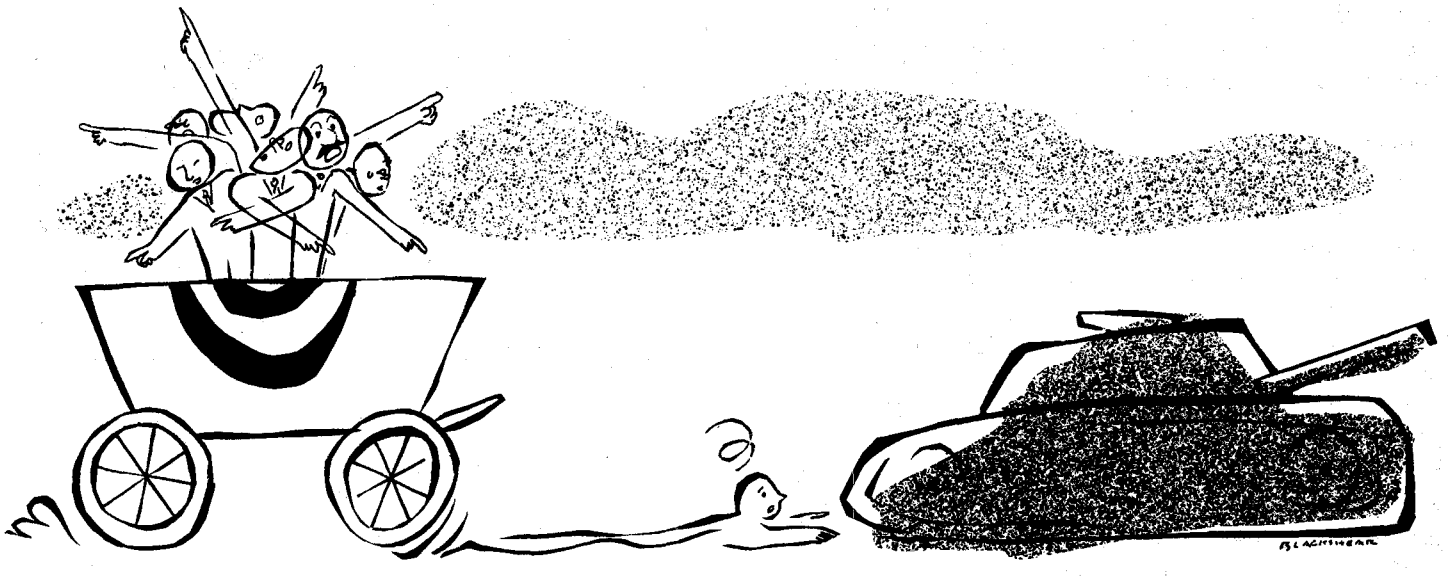
The criticism one hears outside Prague is consistent. There is inertia and drift; nothing has changed except the faces at the top. Havel himself, in a speech in Austria in July, spoke of his emotional state after Czechoslovakia's elections the previous month: "I found myself standing bewildered, lacking the inner motivation for anything at all, feeling exhausted, almost irrelevant. . . . Somewhere in the depths of this feeling lay fear: fear that we had taken on too much, fear that we wouldn't be up to the job, fear of our own inadequacy; in short, fear of our very selves."

This speech was an excellent example of living in truth, a wondrous novelty for a politician. But it also suggests the consequences of antipolitics. For Havel's sense of paralysis could not help but communicate itself to his compatriots. Now there is a tangible rationalization for why the hated *nomenklatura* are still in place: Minister Klaus, they say outside Prague, he's the man who will clear away the deadwood and get things done (even if the specifics of his economic program may sound alarming).

Another remark surfaced regularly in a series of conversations I had in the industrial and farming towns of northern Bohemia: Civic Forum is part of the problem; it's full of Communists. On the face of it, this is the most surprising complaint. But with the dead hand of "actually existing socialism" still visible everywhere, politicians are likely to be measured by the speed and decisiveness with which they propose to move in the opposite direction; the scapegoats for the enduring frustrations of daily life will be those who delay, for reasons of ideology or of simple indecisiveness, the removal of the symbols of the past, notably the *nomenklatura*. The passivity of Civic Forum in power leads quickly, then, to the supposition that it must be riddled with Communists, with no distinction being made between the reform socialists of Alexander Dubcek's generation and the last-minute turncoats who, as in the rest of Eastern Europe, were happy to jump on the bandwagon as born-again proto-capitalists.

This is where the political logic of Klaus's economic reforms becomes so pernicious. At those meetings in the Laterna Magica theater, Klaus was one of a small cluster of economists, all of them members of Prognosticky Ustav, the Institute of Economic Forecasting, and it is Klaus's more reform-minded colleagues there who have been the first victims of scapegoating. The institute was a furtive center of independent economic thinking set up in 1971 by Valtr Komarek, the economic architect of "socialism with a human face." There were some divisions: Klaus was considered a Friedmanite; another institute member, Tomas Jezek, leaned more toward Hayek. Komarek himself, who was appointed Deputy Premier in the new government, was said to favor a slower pace of reforms to minimize the social cost. He justified his caution by pointing to early polls that showed that less than 5 percent of Czechoslovaks favored capitalism, while nearly half wanted to maintain state control of the economy. Yet Komarek is hardly a progressive, and he has also acquired the reputation of lacking political tact. On a visit to Chile in March for the inauguration of the new civilian government, Komarek invited Gen. Augusto Pinochet to visit Prague, adding that he considered Pinochet "an original personage who has much to tell us." Komarek's fortunes have not prospered.

Unceremoniously swept aside by the free-market tide were other economists of the Prague Spring generation such as Ota Sik, an adviser to Havel. Sik was the author of the New Economic Model that Czechoslovakia introduced in 1967, parallel with similar reforms in Hungary. Even he no longer has any illusions about the reforms of that era. But he has continued to argue in favor of not only a "social



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market economy but a socially just market economy with strongly ecological goals." (The ecological dimension can scarcely be ignored in any discussion of the Czechoslovak economy: The sulfur-laden air of Bohemia accounts for Europe's highest cancer rates, and the Baroque saints on Prague's Charles Bridge are blackened by soot and eaten away by acid rain.)

"To pursue a so-called third way is foolish," Klaus retorts. He wants "a market economy without any adjectives." Marketization must be swift and uncompromising, with the primary goal of breaking state economic monopolies, even at the cost of high unemployment. He points to present-day Hungary and the Poland of 1988-89 (as, ironically, the inflexible Communist regime of Gustav Husak did) to demonstrate the messy outcome of halfway reforms. To avoid a social backlash, he may be counting on three things: the lack of any organized alternative, the disastrous passivity that has been bred in the Czechoslovak work force over the past forty years and the evidence from countries like Thatcher's Britain that large numbers of unemployed workers may be too socially atomized to mount an effective resistance.

In any postdictatorial society, there is the demand for a reckoning with the past. But the problem in Eastern Europe is defining the crime—and the criminals. In Romania, one can at least go after former members of the Securitate, assuming they can be found. In Poland, you can search higher in the chain of command for the killers of Father Jerzy Popieluszko. But in Czechoslovakia the crime was to squeeze the moral life out of an entire society. As Havel has pointed out so well, it takes millions of people to bring about this state of affairs: those who acquiesce as well as those who run the secret police and the censor's office. This makes punishment more difficult in some ways, but the temptation greater in others. Every factory worker can point to one, or two, or five people of his or her acquaintance who can plausibly be considered a criminal.

But when does a reckoning become a purge? Recently there have been large demonstrations demanding the banning of the Communist Party in response to a call by its new (and already ex-) leader, Vasil Mohorita, to put political struggle back on the agenda. The new Communist slogan, "No democracy without pluralism, no pluralism without the Communist Party," is preposterous in one sense, given the party's notable lack of interest in democracy for forty years. But in another sense it must be taken absolutely literally, galling though that may be. An attack on party membership per se, as opposed to the prosecution of specific criminal acts (there were, after all, 1.7 million card-carrying Communists, and a party card was often a condition of employment), would put Czechoslovakia on a slippery slope.

There is also the clear risk of retribution being sought along what Garton Ash calls a "red-pink continuum." The most celebrated victims of this have been the leaders of New Forum in the German Democratic Republic, who were junked by voters along with the Communist Party because, in effect, they argued for keeping the wall up a little longer

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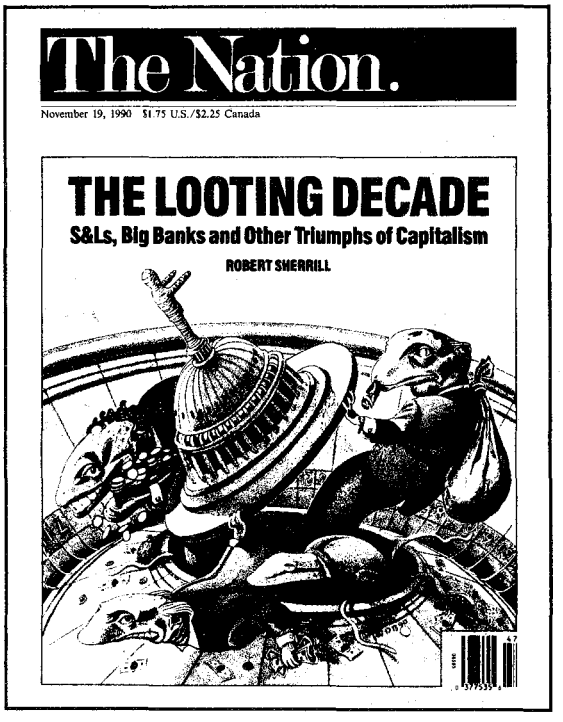
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in order to safeguard something of the G.D.R.'s socialist character. In Czechoslovakia, Klaus's supporters in the Democratic Right Parliamentary Club, with other conservative groups like the Third Resistance, have led the attack on the Prague Spring generation as just another bunch of Communists. Today Alexander Dubcek and Ota Sik, tomorrow anyone else whose ideas can be held responsible, directly or indirectly, for the economy remaining bogged down in the absurdities and inefficiencies of the past.

Anyone tainted as socialist, social democratic, social anything, is running for cover. How this logic operates was visible, in some small ways, at the Helsinki Citizens Assembly. A galaxy of important speakers was promised, but one after another they failed to materialize. Perhaps this was just a matter of the glitches that beset any conference, but the pattern seemed clear enough. Gyorgy Konrad? No explanation. Adam Michnik? Well, you must understand, he's involved in pre-election politics at his newspaper, *Gazeta Wyborcza*. Jiri Dienstbier? From Dienstbier there came an agonized letter to the assembly, full of embarrassment and evasions. The Foreign Minister was obliged to travel to Japan, "a small example of the dilemma of civil society in power." This is a transitional period, he went on, during which things may be abnormal. Instead of quoting the famous line from Jan Hus, the reformation theologian—"The truth will prevail"—Dienstbier preferred the gloss on Hus by former Foreign Minister Jan Masaryk, who jumped, or fell, or was pushed, from a window in the Cernin Palace during the Communist takeover in 1948: "The truth will prevail, but it will take a long time."

In the absence of Michnik, Dienstbier and Konrad, it was left to Jorge Semprun, the former Communist turned neoconservative who is now Culture Minister in Spain's nominally Socialist government, to offer the assembly some final reflections on the velvet revolution. As his text, Semprun chose the 1934 autobiography of Tomas Masaryk, Czechoslovakia's first President, to show how Masaryk and Havel were cut from the same cloth. "Between the 1930s and the 1950s," Semprun argued, "the figure of the organic intellectual was invented, who placed himself at the service of progressive causes, mediated by the Marxist party. This has now disappeared, together with Stalinism. We now have the figure of the critical intellectual, not committed to any social movement. He starts from the assumption that all power is sinister, and that the mission of the intellectual is to be against any kind of power. Czechoslovakia provides the most eloquent example of this inorganic intellectual."

What happens in a revolutionary moment is that the winners seize the opportunity to rewrite history on their terms. In a single elegant sleight of hand, Semprun throws out not only the deformations of Stalinism but also the very idea that intellectuals can ever be socially engaged. And he does so on the basis of an egregiously selective reading of Masaryk. No doubt the passage he had in mind was Masaryk's recollection of his 1918 visit to Washington, where he received the telegram informing him of his appointment as President. "Well, I simply hadn't thought of it till then," Masaryk tells the writer Karel Capek. "When I had thought over what I would do after my return home, I had simply imagined myself a journalist. . . . I was not at all prepared to be made president."

There's more than an echo here, certainly, of Vaclav Havel. But there is a world of difference between being a reluctant president and an antipolitical intellectual. Havel, honorable man though he is, incarnates only one part of Tomas Masaryk's legacy (the gentleman-scholar, the self-effacing man of letters) and not the other, the party politician. Semprun disregards the fact that Masaryk had been engaged in party politics ever since his first election to the Vienna Parliament in 1891 as a member of the Young Czech Party. And he ignores the Masaryk who tells Capek, "I am always on the side of the workmen and working people of all sorts, often for socialism and occasionally for Marxism."

Semprun's rewriting of Czechoslovakia's history illustrates how blithely the political right has seized hold of this historical moment. But the acquiescence of the Central European intellectuals is even sadder. Responding to Semprun, Jaroslav Sabata did not demur. Indeed, he confessed, "I identify enthusiastically with the name of inorganic intellectual. I am more conservative and patriarchal, as an Eastern European, than my Western European leftist colleagues." That was the note on which the assembly closed, and there was an almost audible subtext: Thank you for your loyalty during the bitter years when we were dissidents and prisoners. But now we have repaid that debt of honor; please leave quietly, for we have other fish to fry.

Paper wraps stone. Stone blunts scissors. Scissors cut paper. For a brief period in the freezing fog of Wenceslas Square last November, velvet proved stronger than all of them—the paper of official propaganda, the stone of the armed forces, the scissors of the censor. But, as any dressmaker will tell you, velvet has one distinctive characteristic: It is easily crushed. □

EDITORIALS.

(*Continued From Page 721*)

initiative in calling an Arab summit, a proposal conditionally accepted by Saddam?

Nor is the Saudi regime as united as it might seem from the outside. It is significant that missing from the list of the theologians—*ulema*—who endorsed King Fahd's summoning of foreign troops was Sheik Abdel Aziz ibn Baaz. The most senior religious-legal scholar in Saudi Arabia, he is as well known as the King.

Since the go-ahead to march into Iraqi-occupied Kuwait can come only from King Fahd, these internal divisions within the House of Saud are more important than all the slings and arrows directed at President Bush by domestic opponents of his hawkish gulf policy. DILIP HIRO

Dilip Hiro's most recent book, The Longest War: The Iran-Iraq Military Conflict, *will be published by Routledge in January.*

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BOOKS & THE ARTS.

The Culture of Narcissism

MARGARET SPILLANE

Do we not mystify the facts
And milk the taxpayer of his tax
By the illusion
That our minds serve much higher ends
Than bending backs and blistered hands?
How much of common good depends
On education?
—Seamus Heaney, "Verses for Fordham Commencement," 1982

When some people say that the NEA selection process in itself is censorship, they are wrong. Art is a profession and has experts, as do other areas. When one applies to a public university there are certain eligibility requirements of excellence. When people say the NEA should end altogether and that private business should fund the arts, they are wrong. Big business uses the NEA as a guideline in knowing who to give money to, by knowing who has gone through the distinguished process of the Endowment.
—Karen Finley, National Association of Artists' Organizations newsletter, 1990

Several weeks ago, a body was found in my New Haven neighborhood. At 7:30 on that Friday morning, a custodian discovered the corpse of a young African-American woman on the asphalt behind Wilbur Cross High School. A single bullet had been fired through her head. At 8:30, Principal John Courtmanche made the grim announcement to students over Wilbur Cross's P.A. system, while the local morning news announced the same story to all of New Haven. The next morning's paper provided her identity—Jacqueline Shaw, 21 years old, of 21 Kossuth Street—but no new information. And that was it. Not another word was said in the press or on television about who she was, no columnist meditated upon that round, radiant face appearing in her postage-stamp-sized obit photo.

In fact, for whatever police-blotter reason Shaw might have been killed, her murder was also her punishment for being a woman, as the condition of her corpse clearly displayed. Her shirt was yanked up over her face, all garments below the waist were gone, a handful of twenty-dollar bills were sandwiched between her thighs and more money stuffed into her clenched hand. This part of the story went unreported in the press.

Margaret Spillane is a journalist and a painter.

The truly unpleasant surprise about Finley's performance was its utterly conventional treatment of her subject matter.

The frequency with which the corpses of female homicide victims undergo some ritualized post-mortem degradation is common knowledge among police officers and hospital morgue personnel. Such degradation committed upon the bodies of living women is even more frequent. This is one of several reasons why I was certain, before I had ever seen "We Keep Our Victims Ready," that Karen Finley was taking on a vital and courageous task. When right-wing columnists Evans and Novak took sneering exception to that "chocolate-smeared woman," I knew that Finley was sending seismic shocks through those secure walls of denial and domination behind which woman-beaters carry out their favorite form of self-expression. Finley's chocolate-smearing sounded like no mere symbol, but straightforward social realism.

With that in mind I was willing to put up with the cute *épater-la-bourgeoisie* chitchat with which Finley opened her piece. I thought, No doubt she is making a serious effort to navigate her mostly white, educated audience away from the safe ground of their conventional aesthetic expectations to far more perilous places. If she indulges herself and her audience a little, it's not the end of the world.

At one point Finley provided just the sort of revolutionary ground I'd been waiting for. Standing in a ruby-red merry-widow corset, she talked about the availability of takeout containers of Jell-O from corner convenience stores. She held two such containers aloft, then unceremoniously dumped the contents of each into the cups of her bra. Finley nonchalantly strolled the stage while her Jell-O breasts jiggled with a life of their own. Like Chaplin's wrench in *Modern Times*, Finley's breasts become hilariously emblematic of the way a perfectly safe, normal element of everyday life can be transformed, in a culture of domination, into something whose meaning and destiny are controlled by outside forces.

But what was on both sides of that episode was awful. The awfulness had nothing to do with denunciations from the pulpit of right-wing journalism or censorship by decree of the National Endowment for the Arts. The truly unpleasant surprise about Finley's performance was its utterly conventional treatment of her subject matter. All the controversy seemed to promise a bare-knuckled assault on those barriers separating the privileged from the powerless. But while she seemed poised to indict the short-shrift chronicling of atrocity typified in the coverage of Jacqueline Shaw's murder, Finley presented a laundry-list, headline-formula reading of contemporary horrors. The individual victims she promised to evoke—the battered child, the exploited female service worker, the person with AIDS—turned out to be carelessly assembled amalgams of bourgeois Americans' cultural shorthand for those they believe exist beneath them. "Southern" accents at times suggested sadistic white male supremacists, at other times work-wearied women, and at still other times fulsome, ridiculous Bible-punchers. Then there were nonspecific "blue collar" women's accents, with none of the music of neighborhood or ethnicity but all of the stereotypes of gum-chewing and bad grammar.

This could have been written off as a disappointing evening at the theater. But Jesse Helms, John Frohnmayer and her own publicity machine have made Karen Finley a symbol. The arts community in general sees Finley and the other three artists who were denied N.E.A. grants as symbols of right-wing censorship. And so they are. But Finley also symbolizes—and collaborates in—censorship of a different sort, censorship that ought to be pondered by anyone concerned about the politics of art and the relationship of the arts community to the broader com-

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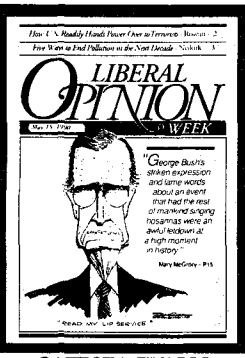
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"George Bush's stricken expression and lame words about an event that had the rest of mankind singing hosannas were an awful letdown at a high moment in history."
Mary McGrory - P15

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munity. She is emblematic of the art-making population's troublingly restricted notion of who its audience needs to be, and its equally troubling lack of alarm at who is being entirely left out of the art-making, -consuming and -rewarding tracks.

It is easy to identify censorship when someone stands up in Congress and says that the creation of artistic works by certain sectors of the population will not be funded by the government. But no liberal defender of arts funding has seized this excellent opportunity to ask the most jarring questions of all: Who gets to make art; who even gets to imagine that they might become an artist? And who gets to have their story told through art?

Finley and three other artists got their grants cut by the N.E.A. specifically because their work contained representations of their minority cultures: lesbian, gay and confrontational feminist. But as their cases demonstrate, it's entirely possible to be a member of an oppressed minority and still participate in the privileges of the dominant culture. As white middle-class artists, they must begin to recognize the fact that they occupy a privileged place within the reward system.

If arts journalist Cindy Carr is to be believed, most white middle-class artists accept as natural their place within the networking, promoting and rewarding system. Carr, a *Village Voice* staff member who sits on peer-review panels, provides disturbing testimony of the degree to which contemporary artists have felt immune from any responsibility to examine their corporate-funded dollars for any traces of blood. "In more innocent times, vanguard artists theorized and fantasized about integrating art with life. . . . [Nowadays] all of us are being faced with ethical questions we've never had to think about before. These days, along with their usual worry (how to get money), artists and presenters must add a new worry (whether to *take* the money)."

One wonders how those so quick to express moral outrage when they feel their own rights are violated could have felt so comfortable all those years taking multinational funny money. One longtime and generous contributor to the arts, United Technologies, builds attack helicopters used in Central America. Another generous funder, Philip Morris, has for some years now been aggressively dumping on the Third World the high-tar cigarettes health-conscious Americans have abandoned. And the list goes on. Karen Finley herself, if the quotation above is any indication, understands the hand-in-glove relationship between Big Business and the endowment but utterly fails to question how the very crimes she rails against are created by those corporate patrons whose approbation she hopes to enjoy.

The status of these artists in the reward system makes them members of the affluent class of Caucasians serviced by both the N.E.A. and corporate donors—the Arts Producers and Consumers, or ArtPAC. It's a far cry from those radical artists—painters, poets, composers, actors, playwrights—associated with the Works Progress Administration in the 1930s, who saw government support as a way of integrating the work of artists into the rest of the working community. Artists were treated as salaried workers and paid out of the same budget as bridge builders and road crews. Unlike the W.P.A. artists, who imagined art itself as drawn from and returned to the broad stream of American life, ArtPAC elects to converse, select and reward within its own small pool, ratifying and perpetuating its community with peer-review panels drawn from its own ranks.

ArtPAC's specialized, class-bound notion of Those Who Know What Art Is—and those who get to make and judge that art—persistently undermines confidence in the popular creative spirit. What's more, the whole process of art making gets sealed off into a realm of magical, inscrutable secrets. To demonstrate what an effective bludgeon such mystification makes, let's look at the degree of intimidation felt by jurors in Cincinnati's Mapplethorpe obscenity trial. Interviewed after the trial, a number of jurors displayed profound mistrust of their own abilities to observe and analyze. Art is simply a subject on which they feel totally disqualified from holding any opinion, they explained, so they relied entirely on the expert witnesses called by the defense. No arts journalist or First Amendment expert seemed to find that irregular—even though similarly constituted juries make decisions on biological engineering, nuclear-waste disposal and transnational corporate mergers.

To even the most socially conscious members of ArtPAC, such admissions aren't evidence that there is something radically wrong with how and to whom contemporary American art speaks: It is simply a matter of taste, an example of the wonderful "diversity" that exists out there in America. Some people go to

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museums, they reason, and some people go to tractor pulls—and neither should presume to tell the other which is superior. This cultural laissez-faire attitude was probably best summed up by the late painter Jack Tworkov, who mused, "Those who enjoy baseball are lucky."

That is why someone like Finley can slap together a crude, broad-voweled bray, an occasional Southern twang and the revival-tent punctuation of a "Yea-uh!" to insure that both ArtPAC's journalistic chorus and audience are amply satisfied with her social commitment. The satisfaction that the performance community on both sides of the footlights has demonstrated for this dashed-off, broad-stroke portrait of The People cries out for an adaptation of "The Emperor's New Clothes" in which a child speaks clearly from the back of the theater, "But they aren't *saying* anything!"

Finley's superficial depiction of working people is, again, only one example of the broad condescension displayed by ArtPAC. Not long ago I received a mailing from the National Association of Artists' Organizations. Over the text of the N.E.A. anti-obscenity clause was emblazoned an American flag and the slogan, "Don't Sound Like America to Me." This is ArtPAC's idea of wrapping itself in the same flag that good ol' Americans love: Real Americans, it knows, are as ungrammatical as they are true blue. Real Americans may not know what art is—only peer-review panels and downtown audiences enjoy that privilege—but they shuuur know censorship when they smell it.

Clearly, alienation from ArtPAC is real—and well deserved. People in communities from East St. Louis to Staten Island sense that their lives and opinions are uninteresting to arts-world decision makers. Their rage was there long before it was tapped by tax-exempt right-wing churches. Is ArtPAC, when it assails these institutions as enemies of the First Amendment, going to continue to condescendingly characterize those anti-N.E.A. letter-writing citizens as dupes while it ignores the genuine exclusion they feel? I wrote support-the-N.E.A. letters to my senators and Congressman in the lobby of Manhattan's Public Theater: While I had been sitting in the audience at the end of a performance of George C. Wolfe's *Spunk*, actress Danitra Vance came forward on the stage and urged people to write to legislators before they left the theater. Does that make me a dupe of Danitra?

Here is a golden opportunity for America's arts community to pause and meditate upon the reasons why such antipathy has flourished beyond their pale, and to learn some respect for that vast majority that's not the usual audience for art.

The arts community must also be concerned with the censorship that happens to people who are not artists, because there is absolutely no vocabulary in their environment to describe that aspiration. It's the experience I once heard James Baldwin describe about his early life: "Growing up in a certain kind of poverty is growing up in a certain kind of silence." You cannot name the sensations, fears, injustices and simple facts of daily life because "no one corroborates it. Reality becomes unreal because no one experiences it but you." When the young Baldwin read Richard Wright, he experienced the first shock of corroboration: "Life was made bearable by Richard Wright's testimony. When circumstances are made real by another's testimony, it becomes possible to envision change." People who grow up in that kind of si-

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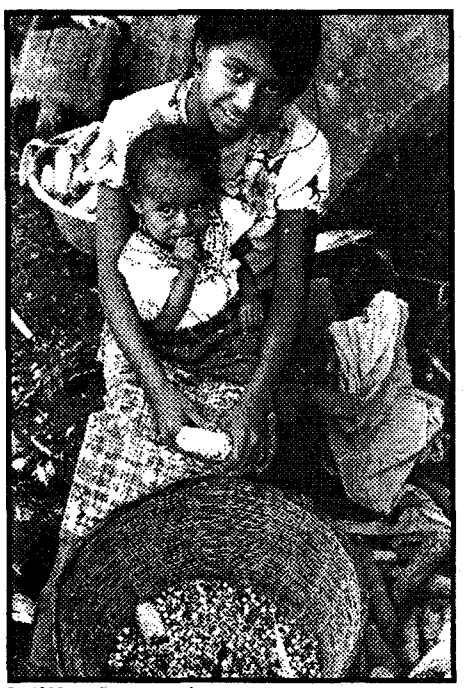

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lence don't know about the existence of a network of grant-giving, rewards-distributing, show/performance/publication/exhibition-sponsoring colleague-rallying ratification.

Like Baldwin before his Wright epiphany, they never see an art describing what they eat, how they sleep, what they dream about, what they fear, what might help them see their way to gather strength. The heartwarming mythology of the American culture industry is that working-class and ethnic artists "emerge" out of their "pasts"—leaving behind all that the culturati consider cheap and ignorant, and striving to find their place in the understanding community of other artists. While plenty of artists act out the swagger of "working-class" macho as a battle against the effete, they really don't care to do the slow, attentive, frustrating excavation through all the heaped-up rubble of history beneath which so many poetic voices lie buried.

It is certainly true that great and successful artists like Baldwin emerge from that silence. But as the novelist and lesbian activist Sarah Schulman wrote recently in *Outweek*, "For any minority artist, part of being admitted to the reward system is that while the benefits are great for the individual, the price for the community is tokenism. . . . [A] single style is declared to be representative of a hugely diverse community that it cannot represent." In fact, says Schulman—who cites her own success as an example—the token artist's isolated acclaim helps "keep other voices from the public arena."

Tokenism may be a strange charge to level at an ArtPAC which throughout the N.E.A. struggle has spoken regularly about multiculturalism. But this comes from a community that so far has interpreted censorship to mean denial of N.E.A. grants to their current and familiar recipients. Artists under attack for being lesbian, gay or feminist can only honestly and effectively articulate their position as silenced citizens by situating themselves squarely within that larger history of silences in America, both past and present.

In the most practical terms, those who have benefited from the reward system must relinquish their presumption to privilege in favor of those the reward system has traditionally excluded. Schulman has proposed reconstituting the N.E.A.'s peer panels so that 80 percent of their members are drawn from traditionally marginalized or excluded communities. That might be a start.

Meanwhile, performance artists searching for a role model might consider the work of Franca Rame, the radical Italian playwright and actress. Like downtown artists such as Karen Finley, Rame specializes in the one-woman play in which she herself is the performer. The difference between Rame and these performance artists lies in the broad audience she achieves and direct content she provides. Rame performs in conventional theaters and in union halls, on television and in stadiums. In her "Tutta Casa, Letto e Chiesa," for example, Rame presents a serious, hilarious and sometimes devastating look into the minute-to-minute limitations, responsibilities and exasperations of a working-class woman. Her character must maintain heroic stamina to deal with endless incursions of boss, husband, men in the street, children and appliances upon her life. Rame has also made theater out of a horrific event: the night she was abducted from the street by far-right-wing thugs and brutally gang-raped. She spares nothing of the humiliation, the sexual slurs, the cigarette burns to her thighs. Rame has forged her own agony into a passionate social declaration: Those unspeakable details of a woman's brutalization, which a censorious society would quickly close the lid upon and bury, Rame propels into the spotlight of the stage.

Jacqueline Shaw will never be able to tell what unspeakable things were done to *her* soul and body before that bullet was fired through her brain. Even if she hadn't been murdered, it's unlikely we would ever have heard about the details of her life. She belonged to that large group of American citizens who neither get to tell their stories nor get their stories told. Any battle against censorship that fails to clamor in outrage against this massive smothering of voices has already torpedoed its own cause with narcissism. □

Past Present

GWYNETH CRAVENS

"Why tell lies and play a part?" asked Marie Bashkirtseff in 1884, addressing future readers in a formal preface to her journal. "If I do not die young, I hope to survive as a great artist; but if I do, I will have my Journal published, which cannot fail to be interesting. . . . If this book be not the *exact*, the *absolute*, the *strict* truth it has no right to exist."

From early childhood on, Marie, born into the Ukrainian nobility, was in command of a nomadic, expatriate household. At her behest, doting mother, aunt, brother, cousins, grandfather, family doctor, servants and four dogs moved from place to place. Meanwhile Moussia, as Marie was called, studied Greek, Latin, Italian, mandolin, voice and drawing, and she tried to arrange matters so that despite her eccentric family (her mother dressed preposterously and was separated from her husband; her aunt loved cigars and gambling) she might go into Italian or French society.

"No one loves *everything* as I do!" she once exclaimed. "I should like to see everything, to have everything, to embrace everything." She slept in a bed fashioned in the shape of a scallop shell; she cultivated a fastidious elegance, wearing white dresses from the best Paris *couturiers* and perfuming herself with essence of violets; she had a high-breasted, small-waisted figure; glowingly milky skin; long, curly red-gold hair; thick, arched brows; piercingly intelligent eyes; and a lovely face one contemporary described as Kalmuck. She visited fortunetellers; she was fond of elaborate practical jokes and masked balls; she wanted to marry an emperor. In a fit of wrath at the age of 12, she smashed her chemistry set because a maid had rearranged it ("in the midst of my anger I couldn't help smiling, for *this sort of thing* is quite on the surface"), and she once tried to throw a dining-room clock into the sea. She played her harp on the balcony in the moonlight; she enchanted the streets of Nice as well as drawing rooms full of admirers with her singing; almost every man who met her fell in love; and she kept a running account of her chaste passions and sharp-tongued repartee.

Her library contained 700 volumes, and she read them all, often at the dinner table, devouring "moderns" like Daudet and Flaubert as well as the forbidden novels of Balzac, worshiping Stendhal and making studies of Confucius, Michelet and Montesquieu. She wrote wise, saucy, occasionally anonymous letters

Gwyneth Cravens's latest novel is The Gates of Paradise *(Ticknor & Fields). She edits Past Present, an occasional column.*

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to some of the great men of her time—Zola, Maupassant, Sully-Prudhomme and Dumas *fils*, to name a few. The writer François Coppée only saw her once, for an hour, and announced, "I shall never forget her." She frankly delighted in herself. "I like solitude before a mirror, so as to admire my delicate white hands just touched with pink on the palm," wrote the 14-year-old in her diary. "It's perhaps silly to praise myself so much; but authors always describe their heroine, and I am my own heroine. And it would be ridiculous to humble and abase myself owing to a false modesty."

In the first half of her journal, the heroine describes her tremendous and constant longing for fame, for brilliant conversation, for exquisite things, for marriage to a heroic personage. She was frustrated by the social and intellectual mediocrity of her family, who kept searching for a suitable Slavic nobleman for her to marry, and by having been born a woman in a world clearly made for men. She railed against the prejudices and customs that restricted her, and she interested herself in feminism.

In the second half of the diary the heroine abruptly changes, permanently adopting a single-minded pursuit. "I had a sort of pride in thinking I was going to make my life glorious and beautiful," she wrote to a friend. "I regarded it with the selfish affection of a painter who is working on a picture which he desires to make his masterpiece. . . . I am so peculiarly constituted that I regard my life as something apart from me, and on this life I have fixed all my ambition and all my hopes." At 16 she took a vow to dedicate herself to the study of painting. The family settled in Paris, and she began spending almost every waking hour at a studio where women were permitted to receive instruction. At night she read Plato. One morning in the Louvre she had a revelation. "Until now . . . I looked without seeing. . . . I used to look and to admire politely, like the great majority of the universe. Ah! when one sees and feels art as I do, one has not an ordinary soul. To feel that it is beautiful and to understand why it is beautiful—this is genuine happiness." All of her ferocious energy, formerly scattered, now became concentrated. "Art! I think of it as a great light, yonder, very distant, and I forget all else and walk with my eyes fixed on this light." In a remarkably short time her work reached a level advanced enough to be praised by some of the best-known painters of the day.

But she also observed more than once that she was too gifted for God to let her live long, and she felt pressed not to squander a minute. From around the year she declared her vocation, she was shadowed by illness. Throat ailments, intermittent muteness and chest pains were followed by deafness, more humiliating to her than the threat of death. She was treated by eminent physicians who sent her to spas for cures; resenting the interruptions, she concealed her fevers and dashed out in the rain to paint. She refused to rest. Her journal reflects her tireless efforts to see; to capture emotion, faces, atmospheres; to get details right; to express her grand visions. Sometimes she became so enraged at her mistakes that she had to restrain herself from slashing the canvas with a knife.

She began an enormous picture called *The Holy Women*, which depicted the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene weeping at the tomb of Christ. She hoped it would be her masterpiece. Meanwhile, she won a much-coveted place in the Salon of 1880 when she was only 20. Her reputation as an artist grew, and at last

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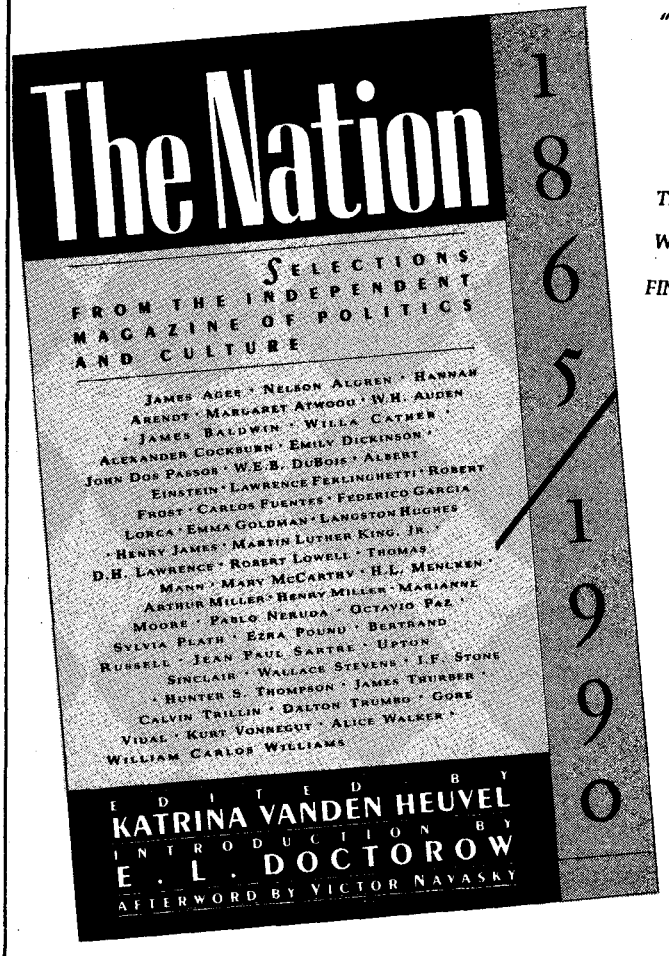
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she was invited to the balls she had wished for so long to attend. Her striking appearance and costume (in an age of bustles, she draped herself "à la Psyche") led her to become one of the most gossiped-about women in Paris as well as the probable inspiration for Edmond de Goncourt's *roman à clef, Chérie*. ("Between you and me, this book is full of drivel," she wrote Goncourt, and she offered him the thousands of pages of her diary so he could learn what a girl was really like.) It was said that her paintings were too good for such a beautiful, rich and young woman to have accomplished, that her mentors must have done them for her.

To her future readers she confided some of her dreams—of flying high above the reddish ball of the earth as she played an unstrung lyre, of a young girl glowing with phosphorescent light in a coffin placed on her bed. At last her ailments were summarized in a final diagnosis: consumption.

She went on working and even traveled to Spain, where she discovered Velázquez: "My eyes are opened, and I stand on tiptoe, hardly daring to breathe, lest the enchantment should be dispelled, for it is genuine enchantment. I seem to touch my dreams at last." Not even her family realized how ill she was. She periodically became annoyed with their cosseting and then castigated herself for her ingratitude. In her diary she observed her decline objectively, noting her thinness and the change in the definition of her muscles.

She had befriended an idol of hers, the painter Jules Bastien-Lepage. He in turn appears to have adored Marie. He also began to waste away, and although she was quite weak now, she visited him daily. She wrote: "When I am there I feel detached from the earth, he floats above us already; there are days when I, too, feel like that. You see people, they speak to you, you answer them, but you are no longer of the earth; it is a tranquil but painless indifference, a little like an opium-eater's dream. In a word, he is dying. I only go there from habit; it is his shadow, I also am half a shadow; what's the use?" Less than a month later she was dead at the age of 23.

She left specific instructions about how she should be laid out (all in white, no flowers in her hands) and about what sort of tomb she should have. It was a little chapel in Passy designed by Bastien-Lepage shortly before his death. Her unfinished *Holy Women* was installed there, along with some of her palettes and easels. And her diary was published. Through it she attained the international fame she had wanted so much, as well as the praise of many, including William Gladstone and Maurice Barrès. The latter wrote, "She, so young, had amalgamated five or six souls in her too delicate and already ruptured breast." The diary and her collected letters appeared in various editions and languages, and four decades later she was still popular enough to merit a biography, *Moussia: The Life and Death of Marie Bashkirtseff*, by Albéric Cahuet. We want to believe, as we read her words—so modern, so exuberant, so full of charm and wisdom—that had she lived she would have been one of the great painters of the late nineteenth century, or one of the great belletrists, or both. Her diary and her letters are easily on the same plane as those written by Virginia Woolf at a similar age. One hundred and six years after Marie's death, her painting *The Meeting*—street boys in conference next to a board fence, a girl disappearing down an alley—hangs in the Musée D'Orsay in Paris. Her mastery and technique compare very favorably with the mature artists who share the wall with her, and she would have taken immense satisfaction in that. But she would surely be indignant to discover that her diary has been undeservedly forgotten. What a pity that the English translation is out of print, along with the letters and the biography!

"When I am no more," she wrote when she was about 18, "practice a bit of spiritism in my honor. Call me and have me speak; remember how I love life and the living. Do not take this as a joke. I urge you to do as I ask; I implore you." □

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FILMS.

STUART KLAWANS

It's a goofy Nativity scene, dreamed up by a pair of orphaned matchbox girls. On a snowy Christmas Eve in Budapest, circa 1888, little Dora and Lili fall asleep under a street-corner statue of the Lamb Triumphant and have a vision of a donkey, who carries them off to happiness. Is this the birth of a new era? Not yet.

Abducted in their sleep by top-hatted rich men, the girls are separated, so that the next time we see them, on New Year's Eve, 1900, they have embarked on opposite courses in life. Dora (Dorotha Segda) is a glamorous courtesan, picking up men on the Orient Express. Lili (also Dorotha Segda) is an anarchist on a secret mission, which she will perform with carrier pigeons and a spherical black bomb. Welcome to a different version of the birth of the modern age.

My Twentieth Century, written and directed by Ildiko Enyedi—remember that name—is a giddy, exhilarating, beautiful and incurably Hungarian account of the wondrous future, which was supposed to begin at 12:01 A.M. on January 1, 1901, but never quite arrived. No less a figure than Thomas A. Edison (Peter Andorai) serves as the symbol of the past century's hopes. He lights up the night with electricity but meanwhile gazes glumly at the stars, as if aware of how far short he must fall. The stars—a friendly, chirping lot—try to cheer him up, though without success. They cannot quite reach Edison, any more than they can liberate another of the film's characters, a chimpanzee, who tells us with chagrin about the lack of foresight that landed him in the zoo.

As for Dora and Lili, they too are captives of their animal natures and their circumstances, pursuing unlimited pleasure and wealth on the one hand, political liberty on the other. In each quest, they run up against Z (Oleg Jankowski, the Soviet Union's answer to Clint Eastwood). He carries his slouch hat, trench coat and manly squint from Paris to Burma in a tireless exploration of the new, and winds up back in Budapest, where he falls in love with each of the twins in turn. This eventually leads to another Nativity scene, in a hall of mirrors, which I won't even try to explain. It's enough to say that Dora and Lili, twin orphans of this century's storm, are magically reunited. By

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this point, though, they're looking backward rather than forward. The new era that had started for them with such anticipation ends, for us, in nostalgia.

With black-and-white photography that's as radiantly beautiful as the star herself—a droll, self-assured actress—*My Twentieth Century* is as eye-catching as it is intellectually playful. If you can, see it in a theater, rather than waiting for the video release. The picture just won't look as lovely on a TV tube; and besides, only ticket sales will convince the distributor to import Enyedi's next film. I can't wait to see it.

In his study of Vincente Minnelli—a book that surely belongs in every home—Stephen Harvey details how the director of *Lust for Life* drove himself, John Houseman and half of M-G-M crazy trying to replicate Vincent van Gogh's paintings and the settings in which they were made. That Robert Altman made no such effort in *Vincent & Theo*—that he deliberately avoided such claims to authenticity—is most evident near the end of his film, when he shows Vincent (Tim Roth) at work in a field in Auvers. Nothing could be further from a van Gogh sky, or a Minnelli one, than the acidic, greenish-gray wash at the top of the screen. It's as if Altman were insisting that you can't find the secrets of Vincent's vision out there, in a world that looks perfectly ordinary to most of us, most of the time. Then, as if to clinch the argument, Vincent shoots himself and collapses into the bleached, yellow stubble, so that a flock of birds, alarmed, rises up in flight. The crows that hover in his paintings of this landscape make their appearance just when Vincent can't see them.

Had Altman meant to focus on the evolution of Vincent's work, such an anti-Romantic treatment would seem perverse. Here is an artist whose canvases bear such a vivid witness to his touch that even today the paint looks slightly wet. To do justice to such pictures, you need to throw in plenty of agony and ecstasy, meanwhile concentrating single-mindedly on their maker. This, Altman refuses to do. Although he is comfortable when following umpteen characters (as in *Nashville*), he never seems happy when confined to just one point of view. So, in his new film, he gives equal treatment to Theo van Gogh (Paul Rhys), allowing the merchant brother as much anguish and screen time as the doomed genius.

In fact, for the first half of the film, Vincent is apparently the robust one (except for his rotting teeth), whereas Theo is sickly. Granted, Theo wears a decent, bourgeois suit while Vincent goes around in rags; but the other van Gogh is as much a misfit as the artist. Theo fumbles when trying to sell paintings, poses uncomfortably when meeting young women, keeps house with a bachelor's desperation and likes to sit on the floor. Without Altman's having to explain much about the brothers' relationship, he makes it plain why Theo's apartment is rapidly becoming a museum for Vincent's unsaleable pictures.

Some viewers seem to have disliked this unsentimental, unspectacular approach to the story, in which the dialogue (written by Julian Mitchell) is resolutely colloquial and the acting generally low-key. My only response is to say that the high-keyed moments are all the more affecting—witness the ear-slashing sequence. What's true of the bear's appearance in *The Winter's Tale* is true as well of this episode: Once you decide how to stage it, the rest of the production falls into place. For *Vincent & Theo*, Altman has chosen to build up to the event slowly and with a measure of disquieting humor. He has the characters playing with knives well before the crucial moment, once in a kitchen scene that seems like something out of *The Honeymooners* (with Vincent as Alice and Gauguin as Ralph), and once on a darkened street, where Gauguin, feeling threatened by a disoriented, half-naked Vincent, makes a great show of drawing a sword. All this time, Altman is cross-cutting with scenes of Theo and his fiancée, Jo Bonger, in Paris, contrasting their hopes for marital felicity with Vincent's unhappiness in keeping house with Gauguin. And so, when at last we get to the moment we've been waiting for, the sense of release comes with more pity than terror. It's all so clumsy. Having cut his ear because he felt he had to do *something*, Vincent lies on the floor and writhes, unsure of what he should do next.

Short Takes: If there's any justice to be had in the movie houses, then *Tilaï (The Law)* should establish Idrissa Ouedraogo as one of the international cinema's most popular directors. Like *Yaaba*, his previous release, *Tilaï* is a deceptively simple story, set in a rural village in Burkina Faso. A man returns home after a long absence to find the woman he loves has been married, against her will, to his father. Everything else follows with the

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stern logic of tragedy, which accounts for the narrative economy and grace of the film but not its visual power. Like John Ford, Ouedraogo can pan across a broad valley and make you feel overwhelmed, not only because the landscape is beautiful but because you suddenly feel the thrill of just being able to see. Highly recommended.

Ouedraogo turned out to be one of the stars of this year's New York Film Festival. Another was Aki Kaurismäki, who is fast becoming a one-man New Finnish Cinema movement. *The Match Factory Girl* and *I Hired a Contract Killer* amazed critics and audiences alike at the festival; unfortunately, they're not yet being released. Instead, we have *Leningrad Cowboys Go America*, in which Kaurismäki follows an electric polka band from the frozen tundra to a Mexican border town. The film is something like the band's music: thumpingly hilarious through the first two choruses of a tune, then just thumping for the final six. Recommended anyway, until more Kaurismäki makes it into the theaters.

The Krays, directed by Peter Medak from a script by Philip Ridley, is a kind of British *White Heat*. Based on the lives of twin gangsters from London's East End, the film stars the great Beckett actress Billie Whitelaw as Violet Kray—proud, protective, deeply cynical about men—and the brothers Gary and Martin Kemp as her sociopathic sons. Medak keeps the violence close-up but the tone cool.

Pop music's most devout Manichaean, Prince, returns to the screen with *Graffiti Bridge*—all singing, all dancing, all spiritual doubletalk. I enjoyed it tremendously. As in *Purple Rain*, the writer-director-star plays holy innocent to Morris Day's devil-may-care sophisticate. Their battleground: a soundstage street of neon-lit clubs and multi-ethnic youth. Will Morris win, with his make-you-shake-it style? Or will Prince, with his Nazarene hair and beard, convince us all to get naked for God? Since you already know the answer, here's a better question: If Prince is as much of an egomaniac as people claim, then why did he hand over his own movie to Morris Day? Watch for musical appearances by other recipients of Prince's directorial largesse: Mavis Staples, George Clinton and prepubescent wonder Tevin Campbell.

Speaking of spiritual doubletalk: Bruce Joel Rubin, the screenwriter for *Ghost*, has another hit on his hands with *Jacob's Ladder*. This creates an interesting problem for the *politique des auteurs*. Surely the author of *Ghost* is neither Rubin nor director Jerry Zucker but rather Whoopi Goldberg, who sets out in scene after scene to save her own ass and ends up saving the movie. In the case of *Jacob's Ladder*, the *auteur* of record should be Adrian Lyne, whose directorial thumbprints are all over the celluloid. (When your hand is that heavy, you're bound to leave marks.) Yet the two films, if superimposed, would bear nobody's signature except Rubin's. He apparently believes the afterlife to be a kind of yuppies' purgatory, populated by investment bankers and quixotic professors of philosophy. There, the recently departed must burn away not his sins but his love for a good woman. Only then may the hero escape from the horrors of this world, represented by schemes involving government agents and large sums of money. Coming soon: the spiritual dramas of *Tax Court* and *Bruce Joel's Alimony*.

Screening Schedule: Filmgoers in the Bay Area might want to drop by the Pacific Film Archive in Berkeley on November 30 for a rare screening of *Aelita*, the 1924 Soviet science-fiction adventure, directed by Yakov Protazanov and featuring Constructivist sets by Sergei Kozlovsky. The print is brand-new; the music, performed live, is by Dennis James. On December 3, at San Francisco's Castro Theater, maestro James will preside at the Wurlitzer for another screening sponsored by the Pacific Film Archive, the 1920 Douglas Fairbanks version of *The Mark of Zorro*.

In New York, Film Forum is presenting a three-week retrospective of the works of American expatriate William Klein, through December 13. His subjects range from Eldridge Cleaver and Little Richard to the fashion industry and the French Open tennis tournament. At the Public Theater, the series "Five 'Lost' French Films" is running through December 13. The programmers are especially proud of showing *L'Eau à la Bouche* (1960) by Jacques Doniol-Valcroze, a sex comedy inspired by Bergman's *Smiles of a Summer Night*; but don't neglect Maurice Tourneur's 1939 film of *Volpone*, starring Harry Baur and Louis Jouvet. Anthology Film Archives continues its retrospective of the Philippines' preeminent filmmaker, Lino Brocka, through December 2. The "Bang Film Festival," featuring all sorts of contemporary music, runs at Anthology through December 12.

Finally, wherever you happen to be, check the schedule of your public-access cable station for Deep Dish Television, America's only satellite network for activists. Among the features this season is . . . *Will Be Televised*, a selection of grassroots political videos from Asia. □

MUSIC.

GENE SANTORO

Wide World, Small Screen

Is there such a thing as politically correct or incorrect art? How can you recognize it, and what do you do when you have? Is any folk tradition automatically more valid than its contemporary outgrowths? Are surviving folk traditions altered by the worldwide distribution machinery through which nearly all culture now flows? Are attempts to preserve dying traditions necessarily condescending and reactionary? Is an African musician who strums an electric guitar, uses a synthesizer or plays a Western rock beat a cultural traitor? What about an American musician who wants to play talking drums, an Okinawan who wants to play reggae, a Brazilian who wants to play fusion, a Russian or Czechoslovak who wants to play contemporary rock? Are they cultural imperialists or sellouts?

These questions and others were raised several years ago when producer/director Jeremy Marre made a series of fourteen programs on world music for the BBC that were later broadcast on PBS. Over the past two years, Shanachie Records, an independent label that specializes in international pop and rock, has reissued eight of them on videotape. (The first four, *Roots, Rock, Reggae*; *Salsa*; *Konbombe*; and *Rhythm of Resistance*, were reviewed briefly [July 17, 1989] in these pages.) Each deals with a different kind of music, but all approach it within the broadest possible context. In fact, one of the motifs of Marre's narrations is that music and culture cannot be abstracted from other aspects of society. But Marre is no dogmatist: While his leftist leanings show clearly through the ways in which he organizes and edits information, he's usually more than willing to let the cultures he invades with a camera teach him about themselves.

Take *Chase the Devil: Religious Music of the Appalachians*. Marre opens with the Rev. Bobby Akers at his rollicking

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Holiness service. (The Holiness fundamentalists used to be called "holy rollers" because they fall out and speak in tongues as well as incorporate music and dance into their rituals.) Each Sabbath, Akers buys an hour of radio time to send out his version of the Lord's message, which in Holiness churches rides what was once disparagingly known as "hillbilly music." "Praise Him with stringed instruments," quotes the soundtrack. As well it might: The sonic line between Nashville's devout worship of the almighty dollar and the church's continuation of tradition and its attempted reappropriation of regional sounds has become blurred.

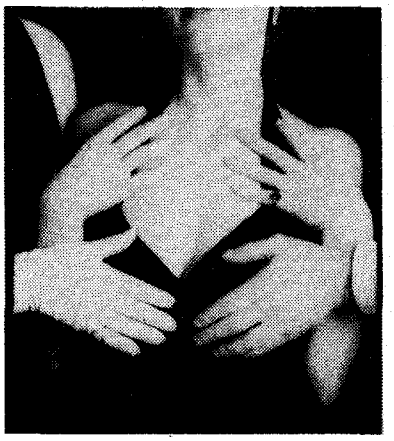
Although the tension between Nashville's glitzy commercialism and its roots occupies some of Marre's attention, he goes beyond such pat dichotomies. Instead, he looks at people, conflicted individuals who have to go on living in the material world. So we see preacher Virgil Anderson picking up a banjo on his church porch to launch into a bluegrass/blues hybrid he developed from listening to the black migrant workers of the lumber camps. We watch nonplused as Ray Gunter earnestly demonstrates how his bent auto aerial, which bobs rhythmically as he speaks, serves as a direct conduit to God. We hear the Rev. Joe Freeman explain why he adapts country hits to his purposes; he then pumps out a lusty twist on "Mystery Train"—itself a twist on the train as metaphor for transport to heaven, which was the code in which slaves sang of their desire to escape earthly bondage.

So Marre's big-picture focus is balanced by human touches. The story of the Holiness worshiper who handles snakes, is bitten and lives is told by a friend who later drinks strychnine and dies. (Holiness cultists count on God to protect them in such trials-by-fire and thus refuse medical treatment for the injuries that result.) Akers's son, after being baptized by immersion in the local river to an antiphonal rise and ebb of ritualistic chanting, spews water from his nose and mouth and then limply hugs his father. One old man in Freeman's congregation displays consternation at the camera zooming in while the preacher lays hands on him. When a pudgy man falls out during a meeting, a woman bends down and rearranges his shirt in order to cover his partly bare midriff. Such moments force us to relinquish any sense of condescension and remind us that we are in the presence of active, if marginalized, creators of part of our culture.

Tex-Mex: The Music of the Texas-Mexican Borderlands starts from the premise that a major theme of border music is, not surprisingly, the constant illegal traffic caused by the enormous disparity of wealth on either side of the boundary. That tells us these upbeat sounds are the field on which many of the tensions between Yankee imperialism and Chicano culture are played out—like the way *norteño* music is the soundtrack to which white cowboys (themselves descendants of the vaqueros) pick up otherwise unemployed Mexican women in bars and is the rippling contrapuntal accompaniment for the rows of stonefaced Chicano men pulling at Corona longnecks.

Marre then begins with Pancho Villa and his ironic theme song, "La Cucaracha," about a roach who needs a hit of marijuana, then moves on to Lydia Mendoza, Villa's friend and a legendary singer who followed the troops during the Mexican civil wars. Mendoza's dark and throbbing tangos have yielded to successive hybrids, which Marre probes as he circles San Antonio, one of the great Chicano cultural centers. In Texas the Depression brought together the German immigrant brewers, with their accordions and polkas, and the Mexican immigrant field hands, with their twelve-string guitars. What resulted is the ranchera, a zesty two-step-dominated dance music that arose from mestizo culture. Marre (via his Chicano narrators) contrasts this truly popular music with mariachi, a ceremonial holdover for the upper classes, and fabricated events like the Cinco de Mayo parade, with its easy-to-recognize Mexican caricatures.

There are times in this video when Marre nearly overwhelms the music with social drama: repeated sequences of the Border Patrol at work in the night, grim recitations of statistics (the cops nab 40,000 illegals a year, and estimate that may be one in every three) and gut-turning secret footage of police beating Chicanos in custody. But as balance, he offers performance shots of various members of the Jimenez family, a powerful clan in border music (son Flaco has graced albums by Doug Sahm, Ry Cooder and Joe Carrasco, among others). And there's the wonderful vignette (which in many ways reveals more than the statistics) of Salome Gutierrez, a record-store owner who is also a songwriter. The only place quiet enough for Gutierrez to compose is his car, so we're treated to shots of his wife



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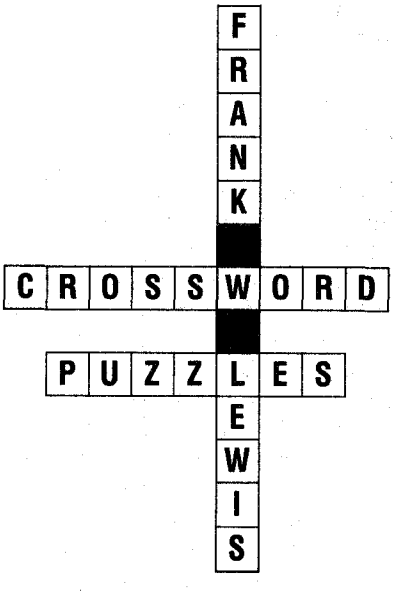

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sitting in the back seat and scribbling his dictation for a smuggler's tune called "El Gato Nero" while he tools around San Antonio.

In a way, *Shotguns and Accordions: Music of the Marijuana Growing Regions of Colombia* uncovers more about the weaknesses and drawbacks of Marre's approach than it does about its ostensible subject, vallenato music. It opens with a shot of a dozen brass bands blaring in a graveyard, while the narrator intones with solemn sarcasm, "We've buried a lot of bodies here, and most of our culture too." From here on, there's a great deal of social history and nowhere near as much music as there ought to be.

Vallenatas are raunchy, accordion-propelled dance tunes that now dominate Colombian musical culture; they sound remarkably akin to the buoyant strains of the Louisiana bayou and South African townships. According to Marre's interviewees and narrators, they are also the favorite sounds of Colombia's two mafias, the white and the black, which controlled the country's huge pot trade from the late 1960s until its collapse in the mid-1970s. Marre notes the racial conflict between mafias (the wealthy urban whites moved into the cocaine trade, the poorer rural blacks turned to banditry), runs footage of a confrontation between a smuggler's fishing boat and the U.S. Coast Guard, takes shots of government troops burning heaps of coca plants. And he looks at the big annual vallenato festival that offers a recording contract as its prize; it is said to be rigged by the government and the record industry and window-dressed by having favorite son Gabriel García Márquez as one of the jurors.

Even if all of those assertions are true—and there's little reason to doubt them—they're presented aggressively and relentlessly and at the music's expense. More unsettling, though, is what begins to seem like unreconstructed romanticism on the part of Marre and his on-camera narrators—a posture that can tip with dangerous ease toward cultural reaction. There is a nostalgia for the primitive purity of the "indigenous" cumbia form. Interviewee Humberto Daza goes as far as describing the banana-republic period, the time of the cumbia, as the good old days; others inveigh against the "invasion" of the "foreign" accordion, which displaced the Native American flutes central to the cumbia. But we don't learn how or why the accordion became a favored instrument, how vallenato evolved, or even why the mafias (and other Colombians) preferred vallenato to cumbia.

No doubt the continuing disappearance of whole chunks of human culture, from regional art forms to entire ways of life, is as lamentable as it is inevitable. Obviously whatever can be recorded for posterity should be. It's equally true that people struggling against imperialism can often, in the process, distort their histories, looking to what seems like a rosy past to find strength to resist the present. But the recommendation of such a romantic movement as the solution to current social problems is disquieting. When one Colombian Native American village leader talks of restoring the old culture in toto, one hears Allan Bloom or Alexander Solzhenitsyn. By contrast, in the course of the upheavals of the 1960s, Jamaicans like Bob Marley didn't return to playing mento; they

"I want to howl and foam at the mouth"
—Joseph Conrad

WRITER'S BLOCK
Zachary Leader

What is "writer's block?" Who coined the term, and why? Can a writer be "blocked" and still keep writing? When does a problem with writing—the sort most writers encounter—become a "block?" Here is the first book to explore a phenomenon that is widely talked about but little understood.

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drew on Rastafarian tradition, infused it with the U.S. r&b they loved and forged reggae to voice their land's hopes and discontents. In what was then Rhodesia, Thomas Mapfumo adapted the native rhythms and sayings of his Shona tribe to electric instruments and U.S. rock to create chimurenga, whose potency as a cultural weapon against imperialism was confirmed by Mapfumo's imprisonment at the hands of Ian Smith's government. Going back to the future, as Marre should know, only works in the movies.

Which brings us to *The Spirit of Samba: Black Music of Brazil*. Like the United States, Brazil is a huge multi-ethnic society, with a fault line of white-black inequality running through it and a plethora of musical forms that reflect its diversity. Like the blues in the United States, the samba in Brazil is the foundation on which most newer forms, from bossa nova to tropicalia, have been built.

Marre opens with Rio's famed carnival, a festival that—like Mardi Gras in New Orleans—is the expression of a syncretic culture, with whites and blacks dancing in the streets to a riotous collision of African and European and Native American symbolism. At the same time, the economic gulf between Rio's *favelas* (black ghettos) and the southern part of the city, where the privileged whites live, demonstrates all too painfully that cultural syncretism doesn't necessarily transform, or even dent, the social hierarchy.

However, in Brazil as in Colombia, what Marre and his guides mean by culture isn't necessarily clear. A Brazilian commentator says, "Culture and religion are the two most important things we have as weapons of resistance [to imperialism]." But when Marre takes us through Bahia, Brazil's most African region, and its capital city of Salvador, as he talks to black activists and leftist cultural leaders like Gilberto Gil, we begin to get the creepy feeling that here again he's pursuing a variant of the notion of the purity of the *Volk*, which sees them as the repository of some ur-culture that transcends contemporary social imperatives. Marre thus implies serious questions—those at the beginning of this column—in addition to those his narration explicitly raises.

It is a tribute to Marre's intelligence and perceptiveness that his work raises these issues at all—you sure won't get them from MTV. After all, Marre is one of a very few filmmakers who know how to locate music within a larger cultural context. Another is Les Blank, who has made wonderful and shrewdly insightful documentaries on everything from Mardi Gras (*Always for Pleasure*) to zydeco (*Hot Pepper*) to Cajun two-steps (*Spend It All*); from polka (*In Heaven There Is No Beer?*) to Tex-Mex (*Chulas Fronteras*) to lonesome Appalachian sounds (*Sprout Wings and Fly*). (All of these movies, whether released by Flower Films or Brazos Films, are distributed by Arhoolie Records, an independent roots-oriented label.) Less resolutely political than Marre, Blank has a wry sense of humor and a way of weaseling so deep within a subculture that you can smell it: For a Berkeley showing of *Garlic Is as Good as Ten Mothers* that I caught a few years ago, Blank sauteed garlic in the back of the theater.

Sharing Blank's oral-history approach is Robert Mugge, whose films are also out on videotape now. Mugge has thoughtfully contextualized musicians as diverse

What did our Feminist Foremothers say about Abortion?

Elizabeth Cady Stanton "When we consider that women are treated as property, it is degrading to women that we should treat our children as property to be disposed of as we see fit." (letter to Julia Ward Howe, October 16, 1873)

Susan B. Anthony "I deplore the horrible crime of child murder...We want prevention, not merely punishment. We must reach the root of the evil...It is practiced by those whose inmost souls revolt from the dreadful deed...No matter what the motive, love of ease, or a desire to save from suffering the unborn innocent, the woman is awfully guilty who commits the deed...but oh! thrice guilty is he who drove her to the desperation which impelled her to the crime." (The Revolution, July 8, 1869)

Matilda Gage "The crime of abortion is not one in which the guilt lies solely or even chiefly with the woman...I hesitate not to assert that most of this crime of 'child murder', 'abortion', 'infanticide', lies at the door of the male sex." (The Revolution, April 9, 1868)

Mattie Brinkerhoff "When a man steals to satisfy hunger, we may safely conclude that there is something wrong in society--so when a woman destroys the life of her unborn child, it is an evidence that...she has been greatly wronged." (The Revolution, September 2, 1869)

Victoria Woodhull "Every woman knows that if she were free, she would never bear an unwished-for child, nor think of murdering one before its birth." (Wheeling, W VA Evening Standard, November 17, 1875)

For more quotations and further information, write:
Feminists for Life of America, 811 E. 47th Street, Kansas City, MO 64110 Membership $10

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as Sun Ra (*A Joyful Noise*, Rhapsody Films) and Al Green (*The Gospel According to Al Green*, Magnum Entertainment) and chronicled as well the history of sounds like Hawaiian music and reggae. Mugge tends to focus on individuals; he throws character into relief by examining it against its background.

It's worth reiterating that Marre's overt social perspectives are generally tempered by what he has in common with Blank and Mugge: the alertness to individuals who cross his camera's path, the realization that they make culture. When he pans across a procession of Brazilian *candomblé* devotees walking along the Atlantic coast, where they're about to toss offerings to the African goddess of the ocean in deference to a centuries-old tradition, he lets us see that they're carrying not only flowers but champagne bottles and factory-made dolls and perfume decanters—the tangled mess that living culture inevitably weaves into its history. Music and art have always moved by adapting the new and the different, even when they're poorly understood and the cultural collision is unhappy. To reject that process in favor of a romanticized past seems as foolish as proclaiming the end of history.

Sources: Marre's videotapes are available through retail outlets or by mail order from Shanachie Records, P.O. Box 208, Newton, NJ 07860; (201) 579-7763. Blank's videotapes are available through retail outlets or by mail order from Down Home Music, 6921 Stockton Avenue, El Cerrito, CA 94530; (415) 525-1494. Mugge's videotapes are available through retail outlets. □

CHRISTMAS CALL

"Mama . . . ," she whispered, though I'm nobody's
mother. She sounded about my own age.
The line cracked with the static
of long-distance. She was much too far off
to be touched.

But who's desperate
at four on a mild afternoon? Two weeks until Christmas,
almost sixty-five and sunny—an autumn so warm
the birds had gone nowhere.
We'd brought a tree home. I'd unpacked

decorations and planned a night soon
for the trimming—I'd bake a rich fruitcake
and mull wine. We'd flattered
ourselves with unhappy childhoods
and had been making it up ever since.

I thought I heard music—was it Rudolph?
white Christmas?—then again that one sound,
over and over, so softly no other
could know. I imagined a door locked or a closet
gone into, her voice muffled by coats

and stacked boxes, a husband with fists cocked
outside. I doubt my words carried:
the connection was bad. Yet I pleaded
to help her, call police
or a priest. At that moment I'd have let her move in.

A buzz caroled our cut-off. I admit I did nothing
but sit there till dark. After dinner
it sleeted, we had our first fire and I drank
a whole bottle of wine. Then later
that night, feeling naked and safe,

I said your name over and over.

Diann Blakely Shoaf

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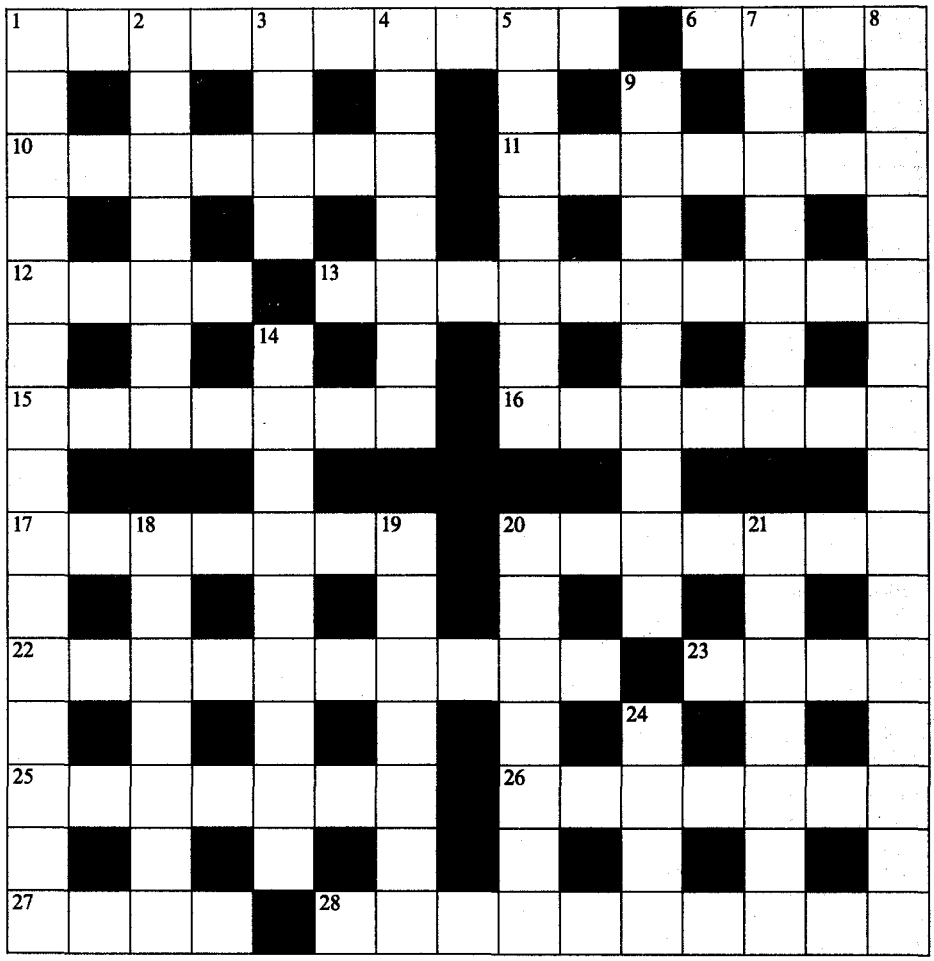
FRANK W. LEWIS



ACROSS

1 Certainly not the main title, but perhaps the direction taken by one like Red October. (10)
6 The lady of Massenet's opera doesn't have a heart for the thing here! (4)
10 Gets a new flock of actors, or starts to make the bell over. (7)
11 Get away with something—with a tear, perhaps—where, one hears, smoke gets in your eyes. (7)
12 The flower of Langtry. (4)
13 Nothing is new this way, but you won't 27-28 with it when on watch. (6-4)
15 I send it out according to the way one writes a speech! (7)
16 A follower of W.H. Auden might be big in America, as a symbol of lavishness. (7)
17 Such things haven't been branded. (7)
20 Chopped cukes with no erbium give way to superior force. (9)
22 Some beetles and bookworms might be. (4-6)
23 Turns pale, with such presented to the court. (4)
25 One has a yen, rare and unusual—but one has a yen! (7)
26 Currently at this place—or not at any place! (7)
27 and 28 Do they do this before the meeting to tell the time? (4,3,7)

DOWN

1 One doesn't necessarily have a walk-on part, however. (9,6)
2 Some footwear and a bunch of does might have to be. (7)
3 This would cover a good deal of Asia with 15 having no car model. (4)
4 Maids at times have old-fashioned habits for certain outings, when they ride. (7)
5 Reputedly descriptive of Nelly. (7)
7 Is it only a fair university, but something to sing about? (7)
8 The usual Sherpas might be leading candidates over here! (8-7)
9 The students at such a school may be kept on a leash, once getting around to live and then pass on. (9)
14 Fish for tuna first in those that might be still operating. (9)
18 Once more it comes up with the sun god, and yet falls. (7)
19 A fallen arch is about a sailor's only minor physical problem—a certain amount of running may prove a nuisance. (7)
20 One for 25 across might be longer . . . (7)
21 . . . and a 20 for this might be most unhandsome! (7)
24 Was the famous ballerina dying to act like one? (4)

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